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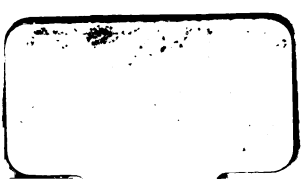

CHRONICLES OF DARTMOOR.

BY

MRS. MARSH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I.

OF MRS. HARCOURT'S WISDOM, AND OF MRS. CURZON'S FOLLY.

AT her sister's house in —— Square, London, Mrs. Harcourt—already introduced to the reader—once again opened a letter that excited Mrs. Curzon's curiosity. It did not seem to affect Mrs. Harcourt herself, but the former lady evidently wished to know its contents.

"From Devon, Mary?" said she, after a few minutes' quiet surveillance of her sister.

"No, Sophia," said Mrs. Harcourt, cheerfully; "the letter is from Mrs. Russell."

The two ladies were silent for a short time; Mrs. Curzon apparently at work, but really watching Mrs. Harcourt, who continued to read the letter to herself.

"Have you disagreeable news?" said Mrs. Curzon, allowing her curiosity to conquer her politeness.

"No," said Mrs. Harcourt, looking up, while the colour came brightly into her cheeks. "Read," continued she, offering the letter, "and you will see it is mere chit-chat, rather pleasant than otherwise."

When Mrs. Curzon had read the letter, she said:

"I do not wonder at the expression I saw flit across your face!"

"You often fancy you see more than really exists," said Mrs. Harcourt, with a smile.

"We will not argue, dear," said Mrs. Curzon; "but I remember Mrs. Russell's letter to you, in which she said, 'Keep up your spirits, do not fret and so lose your good looks,' or words to that effect. 'You will not be suffered to live alone! Wait and see what the year 18— will produce. You know you are a pattern woman, and I feel sure of your future being a bright one!' While here," continued she, turning to the letter in her hand, "she says, 'Am I not a true prophetess?

You are living with your sister! I said you would never be suffered to live alone.'"

Mrs. Harcourt occupied herself with the embroidery in her hand, and did not reply.

"But she says," resumed Mrs. Curzon, "that Mr. Hill is in town! Surely he will call and see you?"

"I do not know; perhaps he may," said Mrs. Harcourt.

"I hope he will," said Mrs. Curzon; "indeed, he ought to call. I should not marvel much, all things considered, if he were to offer to take you back with him!"

"Oh! I do not know, dear Sophia," said Mrs. Harcourt, hurriedly; and then, recovering herself, she added, "but I do not see much difference in Mrs. Russell's letters last year and this. It is true, I am only on a visit with you, and she surmises I am to live with you; that is only a trifling misunderstanding."

Mrs. Curzon put down her work, and, raising her head, looked full at her sister, as she said:

"Of late, Mary, you have become the most barefaced hypocrite! You may laugh," continued

she, playfully holding up her finger, "but you cannot deny your hypocrisy!"

"Nonsense, Sophia; I have nothing to conceal, therefore I cannot be a hypocrite," said Mrs. Harcourt.

"You try to blind your best friends to your future prospects."

"Indeed, you are mistaken! I have no future; that is—I——"

"Yes, we know; you live in the past!—and if a good offer came, from a good man, in a good position, and of a suitable age, you would refuse!—of course you would!"

"But that is an impossibility," said Mrs. Harcourt.

"What is impossible?" said Mrs. Curzon, with a little sneer; "the offer or the refusal?"

"The offer, certainly."

"There speaks the hypocrite!"

"Hush, Sophia dear, do not deceive yourself—indeed, there is no happy future for me."

"Did you not understand, by Mrs. Russell's former letter, that she affected to foresee you would marry again?" said Mrs. Curzon, with a little satire in her tone.

"If I did put so foolish a construction upon it, you see I was wrong, and I am very sorry that my foolishness should have misled you."

"If you did! Ah! Mary, you cannot deceive me!" And then, after a pause, Mrs. Curzon resumed, "But I shall not give up the hope that, with your elegant manners, and still very charming appearance, with your excellent sense and numerous accomplishments, your happy temper and marvellous adaptability to circumstances, *I* shall not give up the hope that some worthy gentleman will see, appreciate, and long to possess, and to place you in the position to which, by birth, nature, and education, you are so well fitted."

Mrs. Harcourt leaned back in her chair, and laughed as she hid her face from the penetrating eyes of her sister; but, recovering herself, she said,

"My dear Sophia, I assure you I could not accept any gentleman to whom I am now a stranger, however much this 'stranger to me' might be struck with the many perfections with which you have so kindly endowed me."

"Nobody asks you," said Mrs. Curzon; "but

some one to whom you *are not* a stranger," continued she, playfully holding up her finger, "and who is no stranger to you, and to your good qualities—such a one——"

"Will not ask me," interrupted Mrs. Harcourt, as she turned away to hide the expression of her countenance from her sister.

"Then it will be your own fault—you will lead him to see 'no' written on your lips, and so spoil your own fortune."

"I shall neither take steps to induce him to whom you allude——"

"Oh! do not be afraid of his name—I mean Mr. Hill!"

"To induce Mr. Hill to like or to dislike me," said Mrs Harcourt, a little angrily; "in such matters I am always a cipher."

"It is well to be a cipher, if, by taking its place, you will take also its value; in that case you may make all that is offered of ten times its original value."

Mrs. Harcourt did not reply, and the conversation was put an end to.

But in about ten days came another letter from

Mrs. Russell to Mrs. Harcourt, in which she said, "Mr Hill had returned to Devon, leaving Mr. and Mrs Charles Hill in town; and that he had asked her to make his excuses to Mrs. Harcourt when she wrote again, and say he was sorry he had not had an opportunity of calling upon her."

There could be no denial to the alteration in Mrs. Harcourt after this news. She affected neither headache nor nervous illness of any kind, nor did she complain that Mr. Hill's neglect had vexed her. She pursued the apparently even tenor of her way, just as before; she was always employed, and very rarely disturbed in manner, or changeable in temper. But her cheek looked paler, and her voice had an occasional melancholy cadence, in which, though there was not an atom of affectation, there was an expression of sadness to which her manner seemed to give the lie, for her smiles were as frequent as usual, and her appearance as cheerful.

Mrs. Curzon—with, as she fancied, a deep insight into her character—Mrs. Curzon saw and understood these signs.

"No," said she to herself, "Mary will not com-

plain; but there is a something on her mind that robs her step of its elasticity, and her tongue of its eloquence for the time being."

"I am greatly vexed for poor Mary," said Mrs. Curzon on one occasion to her husband.

"What, about Hill? Nonsense, Sophia, she does not care a straw. Indeed, between ourselves, I think she would rather not marry again."

"If she had a sufficiency of income, that might be all very well; but now, with her poor pittance, she ought not to be so unwise as to fling away the chances that fall to her share. Yet she does not encourage even one of her admirers, and I begin to fear Mr. Hill will not propose."

"You are right—she does not look favourably upon any one; and yet she has a certain regard for Hill, because he is connected with the past, and had so great a friendship for her husband."

"But what is to become of her? She has not so much as one hundred and fifty pounds a year! It is clear she cannot live on that paltry sum."

"That is her concern; if she likes to live alone upon a crust, instead of marrying a man for his wealth, I, for one, honour her."

"What nonsense you talk!—it is not marrying for wealth; you men put such hard constructions upon the actions of women. She is the widow of a man who possessed an income of near two thousand a year—accustomed all her life to her carriages and attendants, position and influence, wealth and the luxuries it can command;—what is to become of her now, with scarcely bread to eat? I tell you 'Barbarossa'—as we have christened him—would be a very good match, if she were not so taken up with Mr. Hill, who evidently does not care for her; to say nothing of Mr.——"

"To say nothing of likes and dislikes, Sophia—for which you women are famous."

"Nonsense! she could like Barbarossa if she would try."

"It is just one of the things she will not 'try,'" said Mr. Curzon, laughing.

"Then she is more foolish than she ought to be—and you, my dear husband, should try to reason her out of such folly."

"My dear Sophia, you a woman, and put away the choicest feelings of a woman so easily!"

"I know this—that one brought up as Mary has

been, cannot live on her little mite of one hundred and fifty pounds a year."

"She has contrived to do so for these two last years," said Mr. Curzon, "which is pretty good proof not only that it can be done, but that she means to do it."

"You blind creature! Just like you men, who think we women may be crammed into nut-shells and kept out of sight! I do not deny that for these two years she has managed very well; and perhaps even for another year she would put up with, to her, strange and uncouth customs, in the bright hope of emancipation from such thraldom at the end of that time."

"Then you mean to tell me that ever since her husband's death she has had another man in her head for her next—eh, Sophia?"

"How can you shock me so?" said Mrs. Curzon; "why, Mary would expire at the very thought."

"That is the plain reading of the information you honour me with."

"Then it is wrong. As I have said, you men are so hard. To do Mary but the simplest justice,

I never heard her mention any one with favour as regards herself and the future. But then, she never attempts to hide that she likes Mr. Hill."

"Quite right. I know she never conceals her liking for Hill as a friend, but then the regard goes no further."

"Then do you in your wisdom think she would say 'No' if Mr. Hill made proposals?"

"That is another thing. All we have to remember is that he has not proposed; and, if I may judge from appearances, he has no intention."

"I begin to fear so," said Mrs. Curzon dejectedly; "his coming to town and not calling on her looks so very slow."

"That she, like a wise woman, puts aside all idea of a query of consequence from his lips."

"You are Job's comforter, indeed!" said she.

"But why should you so trouble yourself about Mary? If she likes to remain as she is, though poor, instead of becoming rich by marriage with a man for whom she does not care a straw—what is that to us?"

"She cannot live on her income, I have told you that before. She will die. She will pine away for lack of food and clothes."

"We will feed and clothe her; give her the shelter of our roof, a warm seat at our hearth, and a cosy place in our hearts. Will that do, Sophia?"

"She is too proud for that!"

"Poor Mary! too poor to live, too wise to marry, and too proud to benefit!"

In a day or two after these conversations, Mrs. Harcourt had a letter from Mr. Hill, apologizing for his apparent neglect, and telling her—

"That he was so much exhausted by the great heat of London, accustomed as he was to the fresh moor air, that in self-defence he was compelled to return to Devon. That he had left Charlie and his wife with only half an hour's notice, and that he would write again shortly."

If this letter did not revive the supposed-to-be-extinguished hopes of Mrs. Harcourt, it certainly had a pleasant effect on Mrs. Curzon, inasmuch as that she again settled it in her own mind—

"That Mr. Hill was an eccentric man, who had a way peculiar to himself in most things; and that when the right time came, he would surely indemnify her for all her anxiety, by making proposals to—Mrs. Harcourt."

CHAPTER II.

HOW THE VILLAGE OF LAWSLEIGH FARED IN THE ABSENCE OF PARSON HILL.

PARSON HILL was not absent from Lawsleigh for more than a fortnight; and during that time Mr. Gray had the parish in his own hands. He was indefatigable in his attempts to bring it into what he called "order." But as each day, and week passed, he was obliged to acknowledge that he was no nearer that great desideratum, "a perfect parish," than when he began.

Peter Barker was the same drunken, cruel, and worthless character. His wife the same painstaking, hardworking woman; but, alas! also with the same indiscreet tongue.

The scenes at the "Packhorse" had not

improved. The Widow Mason's guests were just as uproarious, and she herself as bitter and sarcastic as ever.

In Mr. Gray's visits to the smithy, we are sorry to say, he still continued to allow his zeal to outrun his discretion. He had but one subject upon which to exercise his eloquence—the evils of gin-palaces, public-houses, and beershops. But as none of these were known at Lawsleigh—for apples are grown plentifully in the county, and cider is the common beverage—so in proportion as Mr. Gray's conversation was not understood by the aged Widow Simpson, did she think it "a very larned discourse."

Not so Isaac, in whose heart Mr. Gray contrived to stir up more bitter feelings than he was accustomed to cherish towards any one. His covert attacks wounded Isaac's self-love, made him feel indignant, and fancy himself treated like a child.

"If he would but speak out," thought Isaac, "instead of talking about such heaps of wickedness and misery as I do not believe possible to exist anywhere."

The dwellers in rural districts happily have no

idea of the amount of sin and wickedness to be found in large cities; neither are the temptations to immorality so numerous, or the facilities so great; and undoubtedly, as a class, the inhabitants of the provinces are more pure than those of cities.

Even Isaac, with all his relish for cider, was not a bad man. He had no other vice, nor was he at all to be put in comparison with the habitual frequenters of gin-palaces in large cities, or even of public-houses in towns.

The cider-shop was a lesser evil than either of these, and its frequenters less morally vicious than those. Still it was an evil, and Isaac felt it to be so; acknowledged it daily; prayed against the temptation; and yet, like an erring mortal, was overcome of it.

All this Isaac admitted to himself, with sorrow of heart and contrition of spirit. But to a certain extent he was incredulous as to the enormity of the evils arising from drunkenness. He thought Mr. Gray purposely exaggerated them, to try by that means to deter him from indulging in cider. And so Isaac became sullen in manner to Mr. Gray,

and irritable in temper to his aged relative; for his mind was always full of the hideous scenes so powerfully portrayed by Mr. Gray, in which Isaac felt sure he never had been, and never could become an actor.

And then Isaac went again to the "Packhorse." He went because he would not be deterred by Mr. Gray! He indemnified himself for the annoyance of Mr. Gray's visits by a dogged determination to oppose him in all things as far as he could.

Poor Isaac! The opinion of the women was still, even in this case, true, for "Isaac was the worst to himself!" He knew very well Parson Hill had committed the parish to Mr. Gray during his own absence; he remembered the parson's speech when he introduced the ringers to his curate, and he acknowledged in his heart that Parson Hill had asked them to obey Mr. Gray as they would himself. But Isaac put away all responsibility by saying to himself, "The parson would never talk at me in this way. And Mr. Gray has no business to come here day after day and talk at me as he does. I cannot stand it, and I will not!"

Isaac forgot it was his own conscience that brought Mr. Gray's words so powerfully home to him. And so, as we have said, he went again to the "Packhorse."

If Mr. Gray succeeded so little to his satisfaction in the village generally, he thought his efforts in the school were rewarded by some improvement. And, on the vicar's return, he expatiated, with much pleasure, and some pride, on the success that attended his labours there; to which Parson Hill listened with complacency.

"But suppose you come with me this morning," said Mr. Gray, "and just hear me question the first class of boys?"

Parson Hill assented, and they went forth together. After putting a few queries, which the boys answered with great readiness, Mr. Gray said:

"Who was Julius Cæsar?"

A long pause—all the faces expressive of being puzzled.

"Who was Julius Cæsar?" reiterated Mr. Gray, indicating by his finger first one boy then another of the class, until he had pointed to each without gaining an answer.

"Who was Julius Cæsar?" again said Mr. Gray, in an angry tone. "Tom Brown, I am sure you know. Speak out; a—a—Roman——"

"A Roman Catholic, sir!" said Tom Brown, looking up brightly; and the whole class looked, as it felt, easy and happy in an instant! The knotty query had been answered by that clever boy, Tom Brown!

"Bless me!" said Mr. Gray, rubbing his hands through his hair.

"I say the hot weather accounts for many things," said Parson Hill, kindly, and as it were apologetically. "But nevertheless, I am quite willing to allow this boy"—pointing to Tom Brown—"is much more learned than when I left Lawsleigh; for I do not think he had ever heard of a Roman Catholic, or knew——"

"It is astonishing how nervous the boys seem this morning!" said Mr. Gray.

"No doubt! no doubt!" said Parson Hill; "the temperature is very high—it was ninety-eight in the shade when I left London, or something enormously high," added he, correcting himself.

And having thus tried to soften Mr. Gray's disappointment, he turned to speak to Mary Cope, and, in so doing, saw, to his intense astonishment, the banished trio, Bill, Bess, and Joe Sands, seated very cosily together.

"How is this?" said he to Mary. "How came these children to re-enter the school without my permission?"

"Mr. Gray brought them soon after you went away, sir," said Mary.

"Umph!" said the parson, knitting his brows.

But the fact of his noticing these children attracted Mr. Gray's attention, and he came forward and said appealingly to Mr. Hill:

"That boy Joe Sands is, for his age, the cleverest boy in the school."

"Umph!" said the vicar, once more. Then, as a smile rippled over his countenance, he turned to Mr. Gray, and said, "Can he count twenty?"

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Gray. "I see you don't credit me, but I will prove my words. Come here, Joe Sands—let me hear you count twenty."

No answer from the "Cherubian Joe," who stood with his mouth wide open, and his fingers

pulling and twisting at the only button left on his jacket.

"Now, Joe," said Mr. Gray, in a very kind and coaxing tone, "tell me—do not be afraid—can you count twenty?"

"Noo, sir."

"Do you know how many fingers you have?" said Parson Hill.

"Noo, sir."

"Can you tell me the days in the week?—the months in the year?—or can you spell your own name, Joe?" reiterated the parson.

"I don't know, sir."

Parson Hill recollected that he had an engagemen, and could not therefore remain any longer; and Mr. Gray, we are sorry to add, felt rather disappointed in his school that morning.

Parson Hill's practical measures for awakening the slumbering intellects of children born of ignorant parents, were not appreciated by Mr. Gray. He aimed at better instruction and higher information. We are bound to add, he thought all children knew how many fingers they had—the right hand from the left—the days of the week—

to count twenty; ay, and many more things of which the children born on Dartmoor were profoundly ignorant.

Mr. Gray had not, until now, been in contact either with such young children, or on so remote a a locality, where, for many ages, learning had necessarily been restricted to "things generally known," and where, even in Mr. Gray's time, the excellent work on "Things *not* generally known," had not then penetrated. But Mr. Gray lived to know that the further a people are from civilization, the more simple must be the means employed to civilize them; and that the children of unlettered parents require the utmost tenderness and forbearance from any difficult mental process, until they have first exercised their minds upon the most simple things; and this even for some considerable time. The mind requires time to awake from its torpor, and if rudely awakened by subjects too hard for its comprehension, may chance to remain always dull.

Mr. Gray is himself a fair example of the many kind, good, and zealous young men who enter the Church, and who intend to devote their time and

talents to the amelioration of the state, and the emendation of the education of the poorer classes. But these good young men, in their zeal for well-doing and entire abnegation of self, forget that others who have lived before them, have, from their years of experience, amassed an amount of parochial knowledge, and an insight into the minds of their people—and, by consequence, a successful method of instruction—which the untrained cannot be supposed to know.

Experience, the great teacher, comes slowly; but we are far from thinking that the admission of our young clergy fresh from Oxford into the wilds of the —at present—uncultivated Dartmoor is an evil. We know that what is called "new blood," re-invigorates and amalgamates with the sterling though inactive "old blood;" and from its youth and purity germinates for succeeding years better and stronger minds.

As has been so ably described by Mr. Smiles, the introduction of railways alone has done much towards placing the whole world on a level; and thus, figuratively speaking, the introduction of railways on Dartmoor may eventually bring its

Tors and valleys on a par with the metropolis.

Then, again, the alteration of postal dues by Sir Rowland Hill brought within the means of all the power to have tidings from their distant relatives. To this succeeded the desire on the part of the lower classes to learn to write—for we must admit that in the remote parts of the West of England, and up to a comparatively recent period, very few of the people on the moor could read—still fewer write.

The author received a bill from a wealthy farmer living in a hamlet on the borders of Dartmoor, and near to a large and flourishing borough town, written thus—"Tu 3 beags o' potites," which, duly translated, means, "To three bags of potatoes."

But now all is fast changing. Thanks to the scientific skill of the present century, which, by levelling roads, brings townships together, and causes man to see his fellow-man. Thanks to our Exhibitions, which, now that we have railways, are seen and appreciated by millions. And soon it will be the old nursery story over again,

> "And the fire will begin to burn the stick,
> And the stick will begin to beat the pig,
> And the old woman will get home."

For the roads are improved, and so the post can travel. The post goes to remote districts; and so they who read, wish to learn to write; and they who can both read and write, in these days, are not content with Dartmoor, mighty though it be, grand and sublime as are the Tors, picturesque and beautiful as are the valleys, rushing, rapid, and ever-flowing as are its rivers. And so the people go to the "World's Fair," and return home wiser.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE LOSS TO THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF A GLASS CASE FROM LAWSLEIGH.

THE school, the choir, the ringers, and a good many of the villagers from Lawsleigh, were, by Mr. Gray's good management, to go by an excursion train to the "World's Great Fair." It need scarcely be told that none of the inhabitants of this part of the moor, except James Marvel, when he was a boy, had ever seen London; but few had seen the city of Exeter; and those who had seen Brent, Chagford, Denbury, Newton-Abbots, and other fairs more immediately within reach of Lawsleigh, were but a small portion of the population.

At first the wondering villagers could not

understand why they must, at Mr. Gray's desire, leave their native soil and go to an unknown world, as it seemed to them, to see what they had never heard of, and what, when seen, very few would comprehend. Some had a wondering sort of awe at the vastness of the undertaking; some an indefinite sort of fear that they should never see Lawsleigh again. The aged wept at parting with the young; and some even of those who ventured to go, and who had suffered themselves to be persuaded against their own judgment, passed the long journey in sighs, and trembling doubt as to the results. But Mr. Gray's courage rose the higher, the more he met with opposition.

"What be London like to?" said one of the village boys to James Marvel.

"It be like to a great big ceety, the biggest in the whole world."

"What be a ceety, James?"

"A ceety be a town like to Ashburton or Exeter, and London be a big town."

"Be it the very biggest?—surely, then, James, just you tell I, be the houses all clitched *(fastened)* together, like as they be to Bovey Tracey?"

"The vary same," said James; "rows and rows of houses all fast together."

This alone was a sufficient marvel to a Lawsleigh boy, for the cottages all stood separately, with little palings before the doors.

"I sim it must look very queer, James," said the boy. "Have they gotten a church like to Lawsleigh church?"

"There be a many churches, lad—a great many; and there be Paul's, as I have a-heard tell, the biggest of all."

"What be Paul's, James?—and what for have they such a many churches?"

"Can't say," said James.

"Be one for Sunday, and one for Monday, and one for Tuesday, and so on?"

"No, lad, they be all for Sunday."

"All for Sundays, James! My!—then have they a-gotten a many Passon Hills there?"

"No," said James, with a shrewd smile; "my belief they have not got one Passon Hill."

"Lor', James, not a-got one Passon Hill! My!—then they be vary badly off. What, then, be the passons there all coorits?—be there a many Mister Grays?"

"I think as you be right this time, lad. Mayhap there be a plenty of they coorits."

"Oh-h! And why havena they got no Passon Hill, James?"

"Coz why, lad—coz Passon Hills isna plenty to be had. Us has a-got to be thankful as us have a-got a Passon Hill here to Lawsleigh."

"Oh-h!" said the lad whistling, as he walked away.

On the arrival in town of the party from Lawsleigh, Mary Cope, with Mr. Gray's permission, went to see Susan Picard. When the greeting of the cousins was over, Susan said,

"Mary, dear, two of the men in our shop will take their day for the Exhibition on the same day as I do mine. You see we shall then make a nice party."

"Yes," said Mary; "and when can this be?"

"One day next week. You stay a fortnight in town, and I will let you know when the day is fixed. John Green and Fred Owen, Mary. And oh, Mary, you will like Fred Owen; he is so handsome; and has such taste in dress."

"Is he handsomer than Isaac Watson?" said Mary, simply, for her jealousy seemed to have

died a natural death when Susan left Lawsleigh.

"He is quite different," said Susan blushing. "Isaac is to my mind wondrously handsome, for I like large men; but then his dress is so common, quite unfit for London."

"I am afraid mine is not much better," said Mary, looking at her own; "but, like Isaac's, it does very well for Dartmoor."

"Oh! you will do, of course—you are different. We do not expect to see country people so well dressed as we are. Indeed, they can't, for they have no shops, and no materials; no millinery, no dressmakers, and no taste such as we have. But you will do, Mary," added Susan, with a little patronizing pat. "Everybody will see at a glance you are from the country."

Mary did not reply, and Susan proceeded:

"And about Fred Owen. Why, he is not tall, and he has light hair and blue eyes; quite the contrary to Mr. Isaac, who is so dark. And then Fred Owen has such a soft voice. And, Mary, dear, put off your bonnet. Here, give it to me! What a thing it is!" continued she, superciliously, as she held it at arm's length.

"It will do very well for me, Susan," said Mary, quietly; "please to give it to me?"

"And what do you think of London?" said Susan, as she returned the bonnet.

"It seems to me to be all houses and people, and——"

"Is it not different from your queer Dartmoor?" said Susan, enthusiastically. "There's no 'ills, and there's plenty of people, and, as you say, Mary, heaps of houses, and always something to do, and somewhere to go, and everything to see; while on Dartmoor there's nothing to do, and nothing to see!"

Susan thought of theatres, concerts, museums, panoramas, or exhibitions as being rife in London. The Tors and valleys of Devon, "Crockern Tor," and "Wistman's Wood," "Lustleigh Cleave," and "Becky Fall," the great lions of Dartmoor and its neighbourhood, were of no value in her eyes.

"And you have no houses," resumed she, "only little bits of cottages, and no people; but you have 'ills enough, and to spare, that nobody can deny. But you are so lazy; everybody going along so

slow. I wonder they don't all die of mere slowness, only that would be too much trouble!" and Susan laughed aloud.

"I am sorry Dartmoor did not please you, Susan. I know many think it a very grand place, and come long distances to see it. But, then, Susy, I am sure I don't understand it, though I live there, and perhaps I never shall."

"No, Mary, take my word you never will understand that queer place. And, pray, may I now enquire after that abominable parson? What is he doing?—standing looking on while young ladies wash those filthy moor children?"

"I shall not let you talk against Parson Hill, Susan," said Mary, rising to take her leave. "If there was anything strange, or not kind, in his treatment of you, you brought it on yourself. He is always kind to me."

"Yes; I was told in the village of Lawsleigh that Parson Hill makes a great favourite of you, Mary, and the people don't like that; slow as they are, they are wise enough not to like to see one favoured more than another. Is the parson in London now?"

"No; he came to London last month, and saw the Exhibition and everything he wished; and now he is at Lawsleigh, and Mr. Gray with us."

"If you Lawsleigh people had had your wits about you," said Susan, eagerly, "but you have not, you are so slow I should think you were born without wits," added she laughing—"but if, as I have said, you had had your wits about you, you would have packed up your great big parson in a glass case, and sent him to the Exhibition; for indeed, Mary, much as you, coming from that queer place Dartmoor, may expect to see there, you may take my word for it, you will see nothing more strange, more curious, more wonderful, or better worth looking at, at a distance, than Parson Hill."

"I am sure I do not know what you mean, Susan," said Mary, chafing; "I know you do not like the parson, but that is your own fault."

"Of course you do not know what I mean," said Susan triumphantly; "how should you, dear? Come, kiss me. Are you sure you can find your way to your lodgings, or——"

"Thank you, I know my way quite well. And

you will let me know, Susy, which day wi
you?"

"I will write when my holiday is fixed;
Mary, mind and tell Mr. Isaac to go to the
bition on that day."

"Oh! of course," said Mary, with a little tv
of jealousy.

CHAPTER IV.

WHICH TREATS OF "WORKS OF ART," AND "MINDS" UNEDUCATED.

ISAAC WATSON and Jacob Smerdon were in the habit of strolling together about the streets of London. Their astonishment at the crowds of people always on the move, at the great numbers of vehicles of all kinds and sizes, at the vastness and beauty of the parks, and at the public buildings, was ever increasing. Sometimes they mounted upon the outside of an omnibus in the front, and went as far as the conveyance went, making their own remarks on everything they saw, to the great amusement of the other passengers, or asking questions of the driver of what they did not understand.

Nevertheless, these occasional excursions did not prevent their going to the Exhibition; and on the day that Susan Picard intended to be there, they also went, with an intention of meeting her.

Susan and her party arrived just as the rush of eager waiters on the opening door had been admitted, and they now went in with the ever-flowing stream of visitors. They entered at the east dome. The scene was not new to any of the four; to Mary its vastness and extreme novelty had not faded, but, as her companions were more experienced in sight-seeing, and more accustomed to see extraordinary sights, they were better able to understand what they saw, and more willing to give an opinion.

Susan began immediately to talk to Mary about the Majolica Fountain as a work of art. This was incomprehensible to poor, simple Mary, who, if we may be allowed to express her real thoughts, felt sure

"That it was a queer thing, to say the least of it —and she could not see it was of much use; the water gushing from the rock at the back of her

cottage was much brighter-looking, and there was much more of it, and it was of a great deal of value to her. But as for this being made of 'clome' (china), she did not believe a word of it; and she could not think that such a queer thing could be of any use." But then Mary was too discreet to express this opinion; and thus, early in the day, she escaped from falling in the estimation of Fred Owen.

They were descending the steps into the nave, when Susan, with an exclamation of delight, seized Mary by the arm as she said,

"There is Mr. Isaac! Mary, Mary, do look! Is not that Mr. Isaac?"

Mary acknowledged Isaac was there, with old Jacob leaning on his arm.

"And, Fred, we had better go to them directly," said Susan, "for they will never find the 'Reading Girl' unless we show them where to go. Mary has been here three times, and she does not know what I mean by the 'Reading Girl.'"

The party moved on, and soon came up with Isaac and Jacob. The two men were very much pleased to meet once more with the "young lady,"

who, on her visit to the moor, had fascinated the inhabitants of the village of Lawsleigh by her wonderful voice! To do Isaac justice, he had not regretted Susan's departure, though now that he met her again he could not fail of admiring her really pretty face and figure, and even in some degree contrasting, to Susan's advantage, her stylish-looking attire with Mary's more unassuming costume.

"We want to show you 'the Reading Girl,'" said Susan, "quite the gem of the Exhibition, I assure you; and fortunately we are so early, we can see her to advantage, before the great crowds intrude upon our pleasure;" for Susan, like many another in that vast building, forgot that she herself was one of "the great crowd."

Isaac explained to Jacob Susan's kind intention of piloting them to see "the Reading Girl;" but as Jacob was quietly enjoying each sight as it came before him, and, moreover, as he was selfishly wrapt up in the pleasure of Isaac's companionship, he did not like either to be separated from him or carried away to some distant object; and though he did not venture to dissent from a wish that

seemed congenial to the whole party, he turned to Susan and said,

"Be she a live meeden?"

Susan, whose short residence on the moor had made her conversant, in some degree, with the peculiar phraseology used there, replied,

"Alive!—oh dear, no! It is a marble statue of a 'Girl Reading,' by Pietro Magni, said to be the daughter of the great patriot Garibaldi; she has an open book before her—and—"

"Oh-h—then I have a-seed she," said Jacob, giving Susan a patronizing little pat on the back; "you be a kind young meeden, miss, and thank you, but us have a-seed the other meeden."

And then, turning to Isaac, he added,

"And so Isaac, lad, us will go on just the same, slow and sure—slow and sure; why should us hurry skurry to theere, when there be such a many things to here?"

Susan's lip curled as she heard the words "slow and sure," and Mary turned away in dread of what Susan might say. But Susan, always great in emergencies, placed her arm within Isaac's, as she said,

"If you have seen her, you can see her again, can't you, Mr. Isaac?"

"Certainly," said Isaac, rather absently, as he saw Fred Owen offer his arm to Mary Cope. But Isaac had not the least recollection of the statue Jacob persisted he had seen; and yet the two men had never been separated.

"Where did we see 'the Reading Girl?'" said Isaac to Jacob.

"Come this way, lad; here, never thee mind what her says, indicating Susan by a back jerk of his hand, "come with I."

Jacob took firm hold of Isaac, and compelled him to retrace his steps, Susan still clinging to his arm. A few paces backward down the nave, Jacob stopped, and, pointing triumphantly to a statue, said,

"There she bees, with a book in she's hand!"

"That is the statue of King Edward the Sixth," said Isaac.

"And will not him do all the same?" said Jacob, not liking to be disturbed in his cosy walk with Isaac. Susan tittered and held her head down; while Fred Owen and John Green said to Mary,

"The man must be a simpleton to take that for 'the Reading Girl,' or to suppose one statue would do as well as another!"

But as Mary was not more learned in works of art than old Jacob Smerdon, she thought their opinion a very hard one.

After some few slight interruptions, the party eventually arrived at the court in which the "Reading Girl" was placed. At first, Mary opened her eyes wide with astonishment, then she turned away blushing deeply. But John Green entreated her to take a good look at this unique gem, while Fred Owen expatiated on the hands and feet, the beautiful forehead, the repose of the mouth, the contemplative expression, &c., &c.

"Now, Mr. Isaac, what do you say?" said Susan.

"I am not prepared to give an opinion at once," said Isaac, evasively.

"But you must admire her," persisted Susan; "and the chair—oh! don't you admire the chair?"

"Has her got no clothes to she's back?" said Jacob.

No one replied to this query, and he continued,

"If her was my daughter, her shouldna be a-

sitting and a-reading there. I would just make she put she's clothes on, and I wouldna let she sit stark naked before folk—shame on her!"

Fred Owen was shocked at Jacob's vulgarity and odd language, and tried to induce Susan to leave Isaac and go with him; but Susan was not to be persuaded. She would take Mr. Isaac to the Roman Court, and shew him "the Cleopatra," "the Sibyl," and "the Fortune-teller."

"Oh! Mr. Isaac, that sweet, sweet fortune-teller; I could wish she was alive—could not you?"

But as Isaac did not see much to admire in an old woman, he wisely made no reply. He did not care much for Susan's talk at any time—but less than ever did it please him now, where he would have been glad to have been left to himself, with his own thoughts undisturbed. He was certainly the only one of the very large party from Lawsleigh, who could appreciate statuary at all. Mary could not bear to look at the nude figures so plentifully displayed; and Jacob liked other things much better. But once, while they were in the Roman Court, Isaac turned to speak to Mary, and

caught her with a face rippling over with smiles. She stood looking at the infant asleep under a veil of lace, the only piece of statuary in the whole Exhibition that gave any pleasure to Mary Cope.

"Because, you see," said Mary to Susan, "that is just as if it was alive. I could quite expect to see it open its eyes; and then it is not horrid in a little baby to be naked—the little darling!"

Our party had a push at the jewels; Susan expatiating on their brilliancy and beauty, John Green on their value, while Mary wondered what could be the difference between green glass and emeralds.

In the picture gallery, Susan would insist on seeing the two "Christian Martyrs." Fred Owen told the story of each—from the youth so peacefully sleeping in his small cell, and who, on awaking, was to meet so dreadful a death. Mary turned away with horror, entreating to be left in ignorance of such terrible details.

But Isaac had read of Rome, and of her doings in her days of splendour. He understood but too well that small glimpse of the interior of the

Coliseum, as seen through the half-open door of the cell, and he listened with a fixed attention to an explanation that he knew must be historically true. When they stood gazing on the female thrown from the rock into the lake or river, old Jacob said to Fred Owen,

"What be the matter with she, sir?"

"Why, she is drowning, to be sure," said Susan.

"No; she *is* drowned and come up to the top of the water with the glory on her head," said Fred Owen.

"Then be she's head light?" said Jacob.

"I do not know what you mean, good man," said Fred Owen, condescendingly.

"He means," said Isaac, still looking at the picture with straining eyes—"and I rather agree with his idea—he means, why is the lady's head so high out of the water?—because the head being heavy would naturally sink, unless we admit it is raised up by a miracle!"

"Oh! it is a most beautiful picture, Mr. Isaac! What is the use of asking anything about the head, when you see it before your very eyes floating so silently down the stream?"

And Fred Owen said Mr. Isaac's remark was hypercritical.

Isaac turned to Mary, and said,

"I am afraid you do not much enjoy these pictures; tell me—is there anything you would like to see?—any other part of the Exhibition?"

"They say, Mr. Isaac," said Mary, modestly, "that there is somewhere to be seen, a small machine that can sew like a woman—now that would be curious to see, would it not? But perhaps it is too much trouble to go—or perhaps I am mistaken, and there is not such a thing."

"Oh! yes, there is," said Isaac; "and you shall certainly see the machinery!"

And later in the day, in spite of all Susan's manœuvres to the contrary, Isaac offered his arm to Mary, and took her himself to see what would please her so much. The whole party followed where Isaac led, not without some little grumbling on the part of the London trio, who, as they had no taste for machinery, thought it a waste of time. Their taste lay in the French courts, among silks and satins, lace and jewelry, among elegant glass and costly china.

Mary was fortunate in seeing the sewing-machine used in perfection by the hands of the skilful *artiste* employed in the building. It was totally different from her preconceived idea, which was that of an actual figure sitting sewing like a woman. The simple beauty and delicacy of the machine came out in strong contrast in her eyes to the huge pieces of machinery she had previously seen.

Isaac watched her; he saw that her whole soul enjoyed it; her eyes strained themselves in attempting to follow the intricacy of the motion—her attention was riveted. In short, all that eager and impulsive devotion that the mind gives to a new and very desirable object was present in Mary's manner; and Isaac's pleasure was little less than hers.

Isaac had never till now wished for riches, but now he wanted to carry back with him to Dartmoor such a treasure of art, such a proof of mechanical skill, and so useful a machine, to give to Mary Cope.

Mary was quite unaware of this desire on Isaac's part; and Isaac took an opportunity, un-

known to her, to inquire the price; and he was both surprised and pleased to find at what comparatively moderate prices the machines could be had.

"Mistress Cope, do you think you could learn to work with that sewing-machine?" said Isaac.

"Dear me, yes!" said Mary, enthusiastically; "why, nothing could be easier. I watched how the lady put the thread when she began her work; and I saw how she used her feet. Ah! Mr. Isaac, if I had that sewing-machine in my cottage, trust me but I would soon find out how to do it. But they must cost a great deal of money—a hundred guineas a-piece, or perhaps even more," continued she, looking a little awe-struck.

"Not so much as that," said Isaac, with a smile; "though I am sure I wonder they do not demand a fabulous price. It is a marvellous invention."

"It is such nonsense to waste your time and trouble about sewing-machines," said Susan, disdainfully; "why, they are used every day in our work-room—I am sure I hate the sight of the things!"

"Oh! Susy, dear, to have them in the house in

which you live!—how I do wish I lived there! And yet you have never shown them to me," added she, reproachfully.

"I can take you into the work-room, miss," said John Green, "if you will like to go; though, I must tell you, it is not easy at first to use a machine skilfully—you must have lessons, if you would really know how to manage it well; and then you must practise daily if you would arrive at perfection."

"I would not mind any pains and trouble, sir," said Mary. "I feel sure I could soon learn; but I need not think about it, as it is not the least likely, after my return to Lawsleigh, that I should ever see another machine;" and Mary sighed, and Isaac heard her.

"If you like to take employment in our house, miss, I can ensure it to you," said the persevering and practical John Green; "just now we are greatly in want of hands. If you like to learn machine work, I can promise you plenty of occupation."

At first Mary almost ceased to respire at what appeared to her the magnificence of John Green's

offer; but happening to catch Isaac's eye resting upon her, she saw there, in one second of time, what she had never before seen. And Mary's colour came brightly into her cheeks, and she instantly felt that her destiny was not for London and sewing-machines. And for the moment she also felt quite sure that she preferred Dartmoor and its magnificent Tors, her small school in the village, the village choir—especially when Susan was absent; but that remark is a mischievous addition of our own—the village church, Parson Hill, and, though last not least, that picturesque old smithy, built of grey granite, with the quaint-looking and kindly-hearted old woman sitting knitting in the shed, to all the London employment or machine work that could be offered to her.

Thought is always rapid—we doubt if it ever surpassed the fleetness of Mary's thoughts at this time.

Nevertheless, John Green, steady and practical as he was, contrived that Mary should see the sewing-machines so constantly at work in Regent Street; and he also put the means of having lessons so easily before her, that for some days

Mary devoted herself to this task, and in the end became so tolerable a work-woman, as to make her sigh deeply as she reflected she never could possess a sewing-machine of her own.

CHAPTER V.

OF MR. GRAY'S ADVICE TO MARY COPE—"NEVER SEE HIM AGAIN."

WE have not before explained that the women and young girls from Lawsleigh were all lodged under the same roof with Mr. Gray. The men got accommodation were they could.

On returning from the Exhibition on this day, Susan went away with her two companions, and the two men from the moor took charge of Mary Cope to see her safe home. Perhaps it was not unnatural that Isaac and Jacob should enter the house with Mary, or that they should seat themselves and talk over the events of the day. The substance of this conversation is not of importance, but the fact that Mary Cope allowed her mind to

be occupied with Isaac, and his sayings and doings, is worth recording.

It happened that Mr. Gray returned from visiting some distant part of London, with several of the women and young girls, before the men's conference with Mary Cope was at an end. This, combined with Mary's unusually playful and happy manner, excited in him the suspicion that she and Isaac were more friendly than they ought to be.

Mr. Gray, during his residence in Lawsleigh, had been totally oblivious of any admiration on the part of Isaac Watson for Mary Cope; but here, isolated as it seemed from the rest of the world, the parting between the two struck him as rather more protracted than was necessary. He was sure Isaac held Mary's hand in his own much longer than was needful for a mere "good night." He was sure Mary blushed very deeply, and that the blush lingered a long time after Isaac and Jacob were gone!

"This will not do," said Mr. Gray to himself. "I will not let that drunkard, Isaac Watson, marry Mary Cope, if any effort on my part can

prevent it! I have taken a great deal of pains and trouble with him, and, at present, all to no purpose; for I know that he still goes to the 'Packhorse!' Perhaps he thinks because he is in London he can do as he pleases, without any interference from me, but I will let him see that nothing escapes my watchfulness. I consider it my duty to guard the young women under my care from harm, and I am sure they will get no good in the company of Isaac Watson!"

Mr. Gray determined that he would not let the grass grow under his feet; and later in the evening he sent for Mistress Cope, to come to him in his sitting-room. After a few trifling questions as to how she had passed the day, &c., he said:

"I think it my duty to warn you, Mistress Cope, against becoming intimate with men of bad character!"

Mary started, and her colour came indignantly into her cheeks. She did not understand what Mr. Gray meant, for Mary Cope did not look upon Isaac Watson and Jacob Smerdon as men of bad character.

"Of all vices drunkenness is the worst!" con-

tinued Mr. Gray. "A man is not himself while under its influence; he therefore commits deeds, of which, in his sane moments, he would be ashamed."

Mr. Gray paused, and Mary covered her face with her hands, as she said to herself,

"Can he be meaning Isaac Watson? Can he be a bad man?"

"I regret much," resumed he, "to infer, from what I have witnessed here, that you are upon very familiar terms with these men in Lawsleigh."

Again Mary's colour came indignantly into her cheeks, as she heard his words, "familiar with these men!" But still she hid her face, for she thought she must surely misunderstand him.

"Let me warn you against them," said Mr. Gray, in a kind tone, for Mary's silence and evident annoyance made him hope that he should succeed in his desire to make her think ill of Isaac. "Fly from them as you would from murderers! What are they other than murderers who destroy body and soul? You think their example will have no evil effect upon yourself! Alas! but too well I know all evil example corrupts, and the

most innocent are in the greatest danger!"

Mary did not reply; she felt stunned and helpless.

"Sit down," said Mr. Gray, kindly compassionating her mute sorrow, and feeling sure his words would have a salutary effect upon her future conduct; and then, resuming the subject, he added, "Let me warn you, let me tell you, this well-looking young man—this Isaac Watson, with all his intelligence and superior manners, when free from the influence of the destroyer, will never be other than a bad neighbour and a worthless friend; if married, he would be an unkind husband—an unworthy father! I make no doubt he has always been an undutiful son."

"Oh! no, no, sir!" said Mary, clasping her hands together, as the tears streamed down her cheeks. "Mr. Isaac is the best of sons; he has always been so—everybody says so."

Mr. Gray was not prepared for so energetic a defence, and there was a short pause before he again spoke.

"His parents are not living, are they?"

"No, sir; he lives with his grandmother."

"To be sure; I know it," said Mr. Gray—"with the old Widow Simpson. How can you then know that this Isaac Watson was the best of sons?"

Mr. Gray alluded to his parents.

"All grandmothers are foolish old women, who spoil their grandchildren with indulgence, and——"

"No, no, sir!" said Mary, interrupting him in her eagerness; "the Widow Simpson is the best and kindest person in all Lawsleigh!"

"You seem to know a great deal about these Watsons and Simpsons," said Mr. Gray, rather angrily. "I am afraid you see more of them than will be altogether good for yourself."

Mary did not reply, and Mr. Gray, after a little pause, again spoke:

"The old woman may be 'kind,' as you call it, by which I conclude you mean 'indulgent,'" said he, with a satirical smile; "but that is all the worse for her grandson."

"No, sir, no!" said Mary, more quietly; "I do not mean indulgent—I mean good. She would never give Mr. Isaac cider; she laments his folly as much as we all do. I thought you would know

that, sir, since you know the Widow Simpson so well," and Mary spoke half reproachfully.

"No; now that the evil is done, she wishes it undone—all old women do that. She must have been indulgent in the young man's boyhood," said he, in a decided tone, "or he would not have had so much of his own way then, and so persevere against her wish in this pernicious habit now."

"I have been told, sir, Isaac Simpson, his grandfather, took the lad with him to the 'Pack-horse,' and that is how Mr. Isaac came to be so fond of cider."

"You seem to know all about him," said Mr. Gray, in a sharp tone; and Mary once more hid her face in her hands.

But again Mr. Gray's stern manner, and sometimes harsh expressions, were softened by Mary's evident distress. And yet he would not give up his point.

"It is my duty," said he to himself—"I must do my duty." But if his manner continued serious, his tones became more gentle as he said, "You will excuse me pursuing a subject that is painful to you, but I think it my duty to say a few

words, and I wish to say them with kindness, and of course with a view to your future welfare. Have nothing to do with Isaac Watson!—give him up!"

"Give him up!" said Mary, innocently; she thought Mr. Gray meant "give up thinking of him," for she knew he had occupied much of her thoughts of late—"give him up?"

"Do your friends approve of this intimacy?" said he.

"What friends, sir?"

"Your own family—your relations."

"I am quite alone, sir—that is why I am the 'schoolmistress of Lawsleigh;' the clergyman who wrote for me to Parson Hill told him I had no friends, and so it was such a good thing for me to get the situation of 'schoolmistress.'"

"Yes, that clergyman, Mr. —— what is his name?"

"Talbot, sir—Mr. Talbot, of Wearsley."

"Would Mr. Talbot approve of this Isaac Watson, do you think?"

"Oh! sir, he does not know him at all," said Mary, not understanding the drift of Mr. Gray's question.

"No, he does not know him; but if he did know him, do you think he would approve of your intimacy with him?"

"I am sure I do not know, sir," said Mary.

She was turning over in her own mind what Mr. Gray meant by her intimacy with Isaac Watson.

"Pray, does Mr. Hill approve of such goings on? As the schoolmistress of Lawsleigh, your conduct and your example should be free from suspicion."

Mary sat silent. She did not understand Mr. Gray. She inwardly accused herself of allowing Isaac to occupy her thoughts; but this she knew was her only sin as regarded Isaac Watson.

"Does Mr. Hill know that you and Isaac Watson speak to each other, and are upon——"

"Oh! yes, sir," said Mary, timidly interrupting him; for she had an intuitive dread of being asked some question she did not understand, though she felt quite willing to reply when Mr. Gray's meaning was clear. "Everybody knows that I know Mr. Isaac—of course, sir, I know all the people that live in Lawsleigh," and somehow connecting

Mr. Gray's query with her present locality, she added, "you know, sir, our village of Lawsleigh is not a bit like London. I know all the people that live there, and they all know me."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Gray, slowly shaking his head, "of course you know everybody, and everybody knows you. But does Mr. Hill know that you are engaged to Isaac Watson?"

Mr. Gray, in his eagerness to understand all the knotty points of the case, and in his great dislike to Isaac personally, and disgust at his habit of intemperance, had ventured to assert that as a fact, that he had only suspected about an hour previously, and of which he had not yet had any confirmation.

But the term was new to Mary. Again Mr. Gray had puzzled her, and she could only repeat the words in a tone of surprise.

"Engaged, sir!—not that I know of!" and she raised her eyes fearlessly to his.

Mr. Gray's countenance settled into a stern expression, as a faint doubt of Mary's truthfulness attempted to creep into his mind, and he remained silent a few minutes. Upon consideration, he

thought he would not press for an absolute reply at this moment, but he would take another opportunity of talking to Mary and learn all he could before their return to Lawsleigh. Meanwhile, he determined that he would not have that man Isaac Watson enter that house again, as long as he remained in it.

"I never allow any one known to be in the habit of inebriety to enter my doors," said he.

Mary—who had been trying to understand what Mr. Gray's last speech meant—was not at all prepared for this, or able to infer that it was meant to point out any particular person, said simply, "No, sir."—She had not the most remote idea that Mr. Gray had told her, "Isaac Watson must not come to that house."

"I consider my home—this is my home for the time being—I consider it polluted by the presence of such men. I should be extremely offended by any one, having the privilege of my protection, permitting such characters to darken my doors."

"Of course, sir," said Mary, for she felt perfectly innocent on her own part of any intention to

introduce such people to Mr. Gray's presence.

Mr. Gray now thought Mary's manner so quiet, and at the same time so frank, that he at once jumped to the conclusion he had made a mistake, and that she was not engaged to Isaac Watson. And this idea gratified him so much, he said with a smile:

"I fancied you were engaged to be married to the man Isaac Watson; but I am glad to see——"

Mary's start of surprise and bright blush of innocence strengthened her words as she said,

"No, sir!—no, sir! Mr. Isaac has never 'kept company' with me!"

"And I am wrong, truly wrong in my conjecture?" said Mr. Gray, now feeling the greatest desire to befriend Mary, and the greatest wish to encourage her to remain as she was—or, at least, to prevent her engaging herself to Isaac Watson; and, under the influence of these feelings, he extended his hand to her, and shook hers heartily, as she said,

"Sir," and Mary wept, "there may be people in our village who say——" Poor thing! how often had she been told that Isaac Watson was

sweet upon Mary Cope! "That is, sir," resumed she, "who have given Mr. Isaac to me; but indeed, sir, it is all talk—we have never 'kept company.'"

And Mary heaved a deep sigh, which did not escape Mr. Gray's penetration.

"I am very glad to hear it; and as a true friend I say, shun the society of that man. He has gifts of a dazzling nature to a young woman. He is manly-looking and handsome, to some extent educated, and—for I do not wish to be unjust—he has some superior qualities."

"Yes, sir," said Mary, feeling gratified, in spite of herself, with this catalogue of Isaac's perfections, and softened towards Mr. Gray by his very kind and friendly manner, and the interest he took in her welfare. "Yes, sir, and I am sure I thank you, sir, for I know you wish to be kind."

"To be sure I do," said Mr. Gray, heartily, as he rose from his chair, and thus gave Mary a hint that she was at liberty to go. "To be sure I wish to be kind to you, and I hope and trust I am. And pray remember, if he were ten times as handsome, as manly, or as gifted, all would be valueless

—all would be destroyed by that one vice. It is the arch-enemy's strongest weapon. Because the man who is drunk is not himself, is not a man; he is a demon. You have seen this man in that miserable condition?"

"Yes, sir," said Mary, still weeping and hiding her face.

"Take my advice—drunk or sober, never see him again."

Mary turned to leave the room.

"Never see him again," said he, as Mary curtsied at the door. "Never see him again," said he. And Mary closed the door, and went to her own room.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT ISAAC WATSON SAID TO MARY COPE, AND OF MR. GRAY'S UNEXPECTED RETURN.

"NEVER see him again!" repeated Mary to herself. And still she comforted herself with the thought that she could not avoid seeing him again—that without the smallest effort on her part, she must see him again! Isaac and herself would certainly travel down to Lawsleigh together, even if she did not meet with him again in London. And when once there, what could prevent their almost daily meeting?

And then again, she could not but have many misgivings as to the future. She felt it was not right for him to occupy so much of her thoughts; but she also felt Mr. Gray had been very severe in his

judgment of him. Isaac was bad enough, but not so bad as Mr. Gray seemed to think; and yet, with a strange inconsistence, she thought, in all Mr. Gray had said against intoxication, and the evils arising from it, he had not gone too far.

Mary lay awake the greater part of the night, occasionally recalling the scenes that had occurred in the day, and then again returning to the conversation she had had with Mr. Gray.

"If I could but do Mr. Isaac any good!" thought she. "Mr. Gray says how clever and sensible he is; and sometimes I think if I was but to talk to him, and tell him what a pity it is to go on so—for it always seems to me that he minds what I say."

And now she confessed to herself that Isaac drunk, and Isaac sober, were two distinct men; and that the latter must be heartily ashamed of the conduct of the former. And yet she could not promise to herself to break off all intimacy with him, although she acknowledged she did feel a great horror of this particular vice; and she repeatedly said to herself through that wakeful night—

"No, of course I must not 'keep company' with him, even if he asks me—that is unless, suppose I could do him any good, because Mr. Isaac always minds what I say."

As a rule, women, when they are attached, think they have power to change the nature or the temper of the men they love. Mary was no exception to this rule. But how many of these charming women have lived to find themselves powerless!

It is true that men are for the most part humble and submissive during the thraldom of passion; and woman, in her credulity, endows this state of things with perpetuity. But when the hour has passed, man resumes his energy of will, gives the customary flow to his temper, rough or smooth, as the case may be; and woman looks on, helpless and in much wonder!

When the morning dawned, Mary fell into a troubled slumber; and when she rose for the day she felt unhappy and spiritless. Her faithful memory conjured up the expression she had seen flit across Isaac's face at the time when John Green had offered her employment in London.

She then took herself to task, and wondered if she had read that look wrongly.

"But it did not matter—rightly or wrongly read, that look could never be anything to her She must not keep company with Isaac Watson, unless he would give up cider and tobacco!"

Impossible hope! and Mary heaved a deep sigh as she came to this conclusion.

The long day passed, and Mary was sitting alone in a little back parlour appropriated to the use of the women from Lawsleigh. She heard the door open, and instinctively turned to see who was about to enter.

"Mistress Cope," said a voice she knew.

"Mr. Isaac," said she, rising hastily; "how glad I am to see you!"

"That is very kind of you, Mistress Cope," said Isaac, as he held her hand in his powerful grasp, and did not seem inclined to relinquish it; "then I am very glad that I made up my mind to come and see you, for—" and Isaac hesitated a little, "considering all things, and considering—considering—why, Mistress Cope, if you had said you did not want to see me, and more than that,

that you would not see me, I should only have had myself to thank."

Mary stood there listening to Isaac, quite unconscious that her cheeks were suffused with blushes, and that her hand trembled in his; but she replied—

"I am always glad to see you;" and then she thought of Mr. Gray, and a spasm of dread convulsed her features, as she said rather hastily, "But Mr. Gray—Mr.——"

"I have just seen Mr. Gray," said Isaac, relinquishing her hand; "I told him I was coming here, for I have a letter for John Lear's wife; and Mr. Gray said if the woman was not at home—as he thought there was a party gone to the Crystal Palace—that I should leave the note with you; and here it is, for Kitty Lear is not to be found."

Mary took the note, and now very gladly gave Isaac a hearty welcome. She placed a chair for him, and said once again,

"Indeed I am very glad to see you."

"God bless you, Mistress Cope; and I will make myself worthy of your goodness."

Mary did not reply; the conclusion of Isaac's

speech startled her a little, and Isaac proceeded,

"Jacob wanted to come with me—for you see, Mistress Cope, we have been everywhere together, and it has been a great pleasure to me to have him always for my companion—and I daresay he thinks it a little hard that I would not let him come with me to-night; but, in truth, I wanted to come alone."

Isaac had been speaking loud; and when he suddenly stopped and looked at Mary, without exactly knowing why she felt confused and unable to reply.

And here it may be remarked, that, in this meeting of Isaac and Mary, the two characters seemed to have changed places. Isaac's habitual shyness had given place to an eager and a hearty manner —he did not seem afraid to speak, and he appeared to have plenty to say; while Mary, usually so calm and collected, was now nervously timid in manner—she did not venture to raise her eyes to Isaac's; and she spoke not a single word.

After a little pause, Isaac proceeded, leaning eagerly forward, stooping his head, and lowering the loud tone of his voice, as he said,

"You see, Mistress Cope, in Lawsleigh I said there was nobody like you—I never had seen anybody like you in my life." Mary leaned her head upon her hand, and partially shaded her face. "Now, here in London it is the same—there is not one like you—not one. But," said Isaac, again hesitating, "that was not what I was going to say. I wanted to tell you, Mistress Cope, that—that I am ashamed of myself—fairly I *am*," continued he, holding up his head and letting his fist fall more heavily on the table than Mary liked. "Now I am come to tell you this, that you may know I am not going to the 'Packhorse' any more—when I get back to Lawsleigh, I mean to be a better man!"

Like a true woman, born credulous, and which credulity no after-teaching or experience can ever entirely eradicate, it never entered into Mary's mind to doubt his words. She clasped her hands together enthusiastically, and said:

"Oh! I am so glad!—I am so glad! Why, Mr. Isaac, how very happy everybody will be!"

"But shall *you* be happy, Mistress Cope?" inquired Isaac, as once again he stooped his manly form and lowered the loud tone of his voice.

"I!" said Mary, looking up brightly, and quite unconscious how much her words would confess of the nature of her feelings towards Isaac. "Why, Mr. Isaac, that is the only thing I want to make me happy!"

"Then you have got it to the full!" said Isaac, heartily, as he jumped up and suddenly seized her hand. This action awoke in Mary Cope some idea of her unintentional error: and when Isaac continued to retain and caress her hand, as he said, "God bless you, Mistress Cope!—you have saved me, you have!" all she could do was to try to withdraw her hand from his powerful grasp, and try to hide the expression of her face from his scrutiny. She only succeeded in the latter—in the former Isaac had the mastery; and he continued: "I assure you, on my word, you have saved me! I care only for you, and if I can have you, I am saved!"

Mary trembled with the suddenness and strength of her emotion; down plump to the very bottom of her heart went Isaac's words, "You have saved me!" Had she—she, Mary Cope!—had she saved Isaac Watson? What a joy!—what a

blessing upon her head!—what a happiness in her heart for the rest of her life!

And pray, why should not woman credit what man, supposed to be the more intelligent of the two, says to her? And pray, why may she not hope and trust that she is of some small use in this mighty world, and that the purity of her example may have a beneficial effect on her companion, man? And pray, why is she to be ridiculed for her credulity? She is born credulous! Disappointment, and a knowledge of evil, come soon enough; and when a woman is not credulous, she has had her full share of both!

Poor Mary Cope! she is in the age of her credulity.

"But, Mistress Cope," resumed Isaac, "you see I should never have had the courage to tell you how much I love you if we had not come up to London."

Mary now ceased that useless struggle of trying to free her hand from his grasp.

"I have seen more of you since I have been in London, and—and I have always seen you the same, that is—somehow I have thought once or twice——"

Isaac was going to say "I thought you seemed glad to see me," but, upon consideration, he dared not venture to say so much, and commenting instead on his own suspicion, he added fervently,

"It was your goodness, Mistress Cope; God bless you for ever!" as again he raised her hand to his lips. "You might have thought I was not worth the trouble to save, seeing me as you have at Lawsleigh. But now, if it please the Almighty, Mistress Cope, to let us get safe back to the old shed, and the church, and the bells, and the good Parson Hill—he has always been very good to me, Mistress Cope—and to the kind old mother, you will just see that I shall never see the inside of that 'Packhorse' again!"

In point of fact, it never entered into Mary's mind to doubt Isaac's words. He had always had a character for straightforward honesty, and was known to be a man of integrity in his business dealings. No one ever accused Isaac Watson of more than one vice; and now that he came voluntarily to tell Mary he had done with it, and, as his words seemed to her to imply, that he would smoke and drink no more, with all that charming

credulity to which we have before referred, and that lingers even late in life with some of our most excellent women, Mary Cope readily credited every word!

And now Mary, like a true woman, by this time feeling her own position very secure, and willing to hide her embarrassment as much as possible from Isaac, glided from the subject in hand to another, by saying, as she raised her eyes timidly to his:

"And, Mr. Isaac, what a joyful day for your good mother! I cannot help thinking of her."

"To be sure, Mistress Cope, that is because you have such a kind heart, and are always thinking to make everybody happy," and Isaac pressed the hand he still retained. "And so do I think of her, for now will I never again cause her one moment's pain."

And now he seated himself on the sofa by her side as he said,

"I want to tell you all about everything I have been thinking."

Mary turned her eyes inquiringly upon Isaac, and he proceeded in softened tones,

"You must know, Mistress Cope, Jacob and I have been together a great deal, and seen many things that you would never see—and, indeed, they are not fit for you to see, or hardly to know about."

Mary perceptibly winced at these words, and cast down her eyes, for she inwardly dreaded a confession of some outrageous scene of inebriety. But Isaac, with a strong desire to let Mary Cope know the worst of him, so that nothing in the future should arise from his past misconduct to mar their present good understanding with each other—Isaac referred to a day in which he and Jacob had entered one of the numerous gin palaces—a day in which they had been silent witnesses of many drinking to excess, but also a day in which they themselves had refrained.

He expressed his horror and amazement at the sight of the crowds flocking there for stimulants of kinds such as he had never even heard the names; and he described the thin and squalid looks of the young girls and women of all ages, whom he had seen intoxicated with drinking "Old Tom."

"A drink ten times over stronger than cider, Mistress Cope."

He did more; he told her the impression made upon him that night by the sight of so many human beings brought to the same destitution, disgrace, and misery by the daily use of stimulants, so disgusted him, not only with them and their wretched condition, but also with himself at the thought that he had ever been seen in a like disgraceful state—that he inwardly vowed, before leaving the gin-palace, he would sin no more in that way.

He had there—by witnessing these sights—been convinced of the awful punishment that, sooner or later, must overtake the drunkard. And he would now pray with all his might to be preserved from committing himself in future.

"And so you see, Mistress Cope, though I don't wish to deny one atom of the truth—that is, that I have been a sad disgrace to my name, and to my native village—why, 'it is never too late to mend.'"

In her own mind Mary quite agreed with the concluding phrase, but she remained silent, and Isaac continued,

"And that is why I am so grateful to you, Mistress Cope—because you do know how bad I have

CHAPTER VII.

OF MR. GRAY'S ANGER, AND OF MARY COPE'S DISTRESS.

NOW, Mr. Gray had been so perfectly satisfied with the conversation he had had with Mary Cope on the previous evening, and so gratified with the fact that Mary and Isaac, according to Mary's statement, did not "keep company," that, to say the least, he was but ill prepared for the scene upon which he intruded.

When Mary went away, he paced his room backwards and forwards very contentedly for the next half hour, thinking the matter over, a little elated with his own penetration, and certainly proud of his success. For he did not doubt, for one moment, that the gentle-spirited and thank-

ful-hearted little woman, so thanking him for his kindness to her, would obey him to the very letter. He repeated to himself, as he walked from one end of the room to the other,

"Never see him again!"

So mild, and tearful, and sorrowful a little woman, and, moreover, "the schoolmistress of the village of Lawsleigh," would be grateful for his kind notice and consideration of her, and, as a matter of course, would never dream of disobeying him.

"Never see him again!"

And, rejoicing over the phrase, and glad that he had given Mary such good counsel—and, moreover, succeeded so well—unlike the "little woman," who had a restless and wakeful night, Mr. Gray slept!

"And is this the way you abuse the trust I have reposed in you? Is this the way you repay my kindness?" were his first words to the happy pair so unceremoniously and uncomfortably interrupted in their enjoyment of that "first kiss?"

Oh! Mr. Gray, Mr. Gray, if ever, during the course of your life, unwelcome intruders should,

on any interesting occasion, present themselves to you, may your memory faithfully recall your own vexatious appearance on this occasion; and may you inwardly acknowledge, with all due contrition of spirit, the retributive justice of the event!

Mary stood speechless in the presence of the angry Mr. Gray, and up rose vividly and instantaneously before her the scene of the preceding evening. Mr. Gray's accusations and queries—her own innocence, and her sturdy denial—his reiterated command, which sent her in sadness and sorrow to her own room, "Never see him again!" And now, here she stood, convicted!

Yes, she felt she was convicted of something; but convicted of what?

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Isaac, humbly, and drawing Mary's arm within his own; "I did not mean any offence by coming here; I came to give—to give Kitty Lear's letter to Mistress Cope, because Kitty is gone to the Crystal Palace; and —and—I wanted to thank Mistress Cope for——"

"Thank her!—is that the way you thank people?"

Both Isaac and Mary looked a little "foolish"

at this query, and Mr. Gray proceeded still angrily—

"A pretty way of thanking people, upon my word!"

Mary blushed deeply, and cast down her eyes; and Isaac—why, to confess the truth, Isaac thought it was a "very pretty way" of thanking Mary Cope on that special occasion.

"Did Mistress Cope tell you I had prohibited your entrance into this house?"

"No, sir," said Isaac, as he still would not allow Mary to withdraw her arm; "I told Mistress Cope you sent me to her."

"I sent you to her?—how dare you say such a thing?"

Isaac explained that he had met him, and reminded him of the letter for Lear's wife, which he had delivered to Mistress Cope.

It appeared almost as if Mr. Gray had forgotten he had seen Isaac, and sent him with the letter to Mary, for he turned to her and said,

"You can receive this man here after my strict orders to the contrary!—and you can allow yourself to be polluted by his touch! Young woman, I

have done with you—never more expect me to befriend you!"

At this moment Mr. Gray stepped forward and rang the bell violently.

Mary had struggled to free herself from Isaac, and he had vigorously detained her. She now attempted to speak, but Isaac raised his voice above hers, as he said,

"Sir, Mistress Cope is innocent. I came here unknown to her."

The room door opened, and a servant appeared to answer the bell.

"Leave my house!" said Mr. Gray, imperiously.

"Sir," said Isaac, more humbly, "will you allow me to assure you Mistress Cope did not know I was coming, until I was in her very presence."

"Answer me this, Isaac Watson—yes or no. Don't waste your eloquence on me, it will not do; but answer me this—Did Mistress Cope, on your arrival here, tell you that I had forbidden her to receive you?"

"No, sir; I told her you had——"

"That will do—that will do," said Mr. Gray, impatiently.

"I did not know, sir," said Mary, unable to restrain a passionate outburst of tears.

Mary remembered but too well the words, "Never see him again!" but she did not know that Mr. Gray had forbidden her to receive Isaac there. She had not understood him when he spoke on that subject.

"Did not know it!" said Mr. Gray, with a look of contempt. "And you can stand there and deny that I told you I would not allow a drunkard to enter my doors? And pray is not this man a drunkard?"

And then he turned to Isaac, and said,

"Leave my house!"

"But it is not Mistress Cope's fault, sir," said Isaac, unwilling to leave Mary to bear the brunt of his anger alone. "And, sir, I am not a drunkard."

"Mr. Isaac means never to go to the 'Pack-horse' again, sir—never!" said Mary, looking up with some sort of undefined hope that this must arrest Mr. Gray's anger; but she was mistaken.

"Oh-h—upon my word!" And now Mr.

Gray rang the bell again, for the attendant on the former summons had wisely retired almost as soon as he appeared. "Leave my house, or I will send for a policeman."

This threat made Isaac raise his head the higher, with a proud almost disdainful air, as he said,

"I will go, sir." But he looked at Mary, as if unwilling to leave her.

"Go, Isaac—pray go!" said Mary.

And he left the room, followed by Mr. Gray.

When Mr. Gray returned, he found Mary abandoning herself to her sorrow. She sat sobbing and weeping unrestrainedly.

"And so you have thought it right, Mistress Cope, to impose upon my kindness and good-nature!"

Mary was silent.

"You told me last night you were not engaged to be married to Isaac Watson; and now—and now I actually enter this room, and see him with——"

Mary now blushed crimson, and tried to hide her confusion by covering her face with her hands. She could not prevent her tears from streaming

down her cheeks, or restrain her loud and convulsive sobs.

"All that I can say is, if you are not to be married to Isaac Watson, your conduct is most indelicate and most reprehensible; and if you are—for I cannot acquit you of having told me a falsehood—if you are, you will be a most wretched and miserable woman for the rest of your life!"

For a few moments Mary did not speak. She dreaded to have to confess to Mr. Gray, that Isaac and she had agreed to "keep company;" but she could not remain silent under the stigma of falsehood.

"I told you—you—I told you the truth, sir," said she, between her sobs.

"You told me last night you were not going to marry this man, or to let him marry you; then how dare you let him take such a shameful liberty—and you, the schoolmistress of Lawsleigh—how dare you, I say!"

Mr. Gray's tones were anything but suave.

"I could not help it, sir." And Mary covered her face with her hands, and turned her back rather abruptly on him, as she felt her neck and

ears glow ; but, in spite of these signs of sensitiveness, Mr. Gray continued—

"Could not help it! What do I hear? Why, this fact will stamp your own character for ever. To let a man, who is not to be your husband "—Mary started, and turned half-round—"a drunken, disorderly reprobate—to let him pull you about with his polluted hands; to let——"

"Oh, no, sir!—oh, oh, no, sir! I am sure it is all wrong. I never meant——"

"All wrong! I should think it is all wrong—"

The conversation was interrupted by a servant, who told Mr. Gray a gentleman waited to see him.

"Go to your own room, Mary Cope," he said sternly; "and remember, at my desire you are a prisoner there for the remainder of your stay in London."

And very gladly did Mary Cope avail herself of the permission to retire to her own room, and nurse her sorrow unwitnessed or unquestioned by Mr. Gray. In her solitude there, by degrees, she recalled the events and conversations of the preceding day; but she could not unravel several things that appeared mysterious to her. She did

not remember that Mr. Gray had forbidden her to receive Isaac Watson there; and she felt sure she had never said, "she would not let him marry her;" but in spite of this strange entanglement and apparent misunderstanding, and in spite of the disgrace in which she knew she must stand in Mr. Gray's opinion, and of her own anxiety on these accounts—in spite of all this, she could not help acknowledging to herself that, in her heart of hearts, she had a comfort that almost nullified her pain; a balm, as it seemed, for all the ills by which she was surrounded—Isaac Watson loved her! He had promised her never again to go to the "Packhorse;" and as his visits there, and his consequent intoxication, made the only blot in his otherwise estimable character, she had nothing to reproach herself with in the fact that she had accepted him.

Mary's faith in Isaac was that of a pure-minded young woman, who suspects no ill of any one, but who trusts, with her whole heart and soul, the man she loves; for he is in her eyes the best, the truest, the sincerest, and the most worthy of men. That sort of faith—independent of intellect—is common

to all women. Women deify men, and endow them with perfections that, in too many instances, they do not possess.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW MARY COPE TRAVELS EXPRESS TO LAWSLEIGH.

ON the platform of the Great Western, at Paddington, two ladies were sauntering together while the train was preparing to depart for the west of England. Their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a gentleman, who said,

"I am going to give you a companion in the form of a pretty young woman—what do you say to that?"

"What do you mean, Charlie?" said Mrs. Hill, for she and Mrs. Harcourt were the two ladies before mentioned.

"I have just seen Gray, and he wants you to take charge of a young woman—one of the wicked

ones of this very wicked earth," said he, turning to Mrs. Harcourt.

"A wicked one!" said she, not attempting to hide her surprise.

"Why, I suppose she is wicked—indeed," added he, turning to his wife, "I think she must be desperately wicked, for she was caught by Gray with her lover.

Mrs. Harcourt walked up to the book-stall, and affected to occupy herself there, while Mrs. Hill said reproachfully,

"You should not say such things in the presence of Mrs. Harcourt."

"And why not?—Mrs. Harcourt would not be sorry to be in a like position with her lover; for my part, I believe she would be glad."

And Charlie placed his hands in his pockets, and nonchalantly walked away; while Mrs. Harcourt's enjoyment of the book-stall being satiated, the two ladies again promenaded together.

"Suppose we get into a carriage—the train seems nearly ready to start," said Mrs. Hill.

They did so; and from the windows thereof saw Charlie and Mr. Gray, accompanied by a young

woman, whom neither of the ladies knew as the schoolmistress of Lawsleigh. After the usual greeting, Mrs. Hill ventured to ask Mr. Gray—

"If that pretty-looking young woman had been convicted of picking and stealing, since she was to be put under the care of two such steady matrons as herself and her friend?"

She spoke in French, so that Mary could not understand a word she said.

"Her lover was stealing a kiss—he was the thief, not she. I returned home unexpectedly, and caught them in the very act!"

As Mr. Gray was not given to hyperbole, or even to jesting, this sentence sounded more strange from him than it would have done from another. Mrs. Hill did not reply, and he continued, "Her lover is—that is, the man is, for I cannot allow him to become her lover—the man is a drunken reprobate; and she, the supposed-to-be-steady schoolmistress of Lawsleigh. You will easily comprehend, therefore, that such thefts cannot be permitted with impunity."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Hill, compassionately. "And is that all?"

"Why, is not that enough?" said Mr. Gray, in extreme surprise. "Consider the man—a drunkard!—and then the young woman, a school-mistress—the thing speaks for itself! Is not that enough?"

"No," said Charlie, who was standing by; "women don't thank you for only one kiss at a time; and a man will always thank a woman for more."

The shrill whistle now arrested their attention. Charlie entered the carriage, and Mr. Gray moved hastily away.

"And so, Charlie, the poor thing was just letting her lover kiss her!" said Mrs. Hill, still speaking in French. "Is that such a crime?"

"Was that all?" said Mrs. Harcourt, feelingly.

"That all!" said Charlie, laughing; "the query does honour to your sense of justice!"

"I really thought she had committed some high crime or misdemeanour, by being classed among 'the wicked ones of the earth!'" said Mrs. Hill.

"And I can tell you it is both a high crime and a great misdemeanour, in the judgment of the Bishop of Lawsleigh, to have permitted such a

well-known drunkard as Isaac Watson to pollute her sacred schoolmistress-ship by even a touch, to say nothing of the man having been seen stealing a kiss by the very eyes of the very bishop himself! I do not see, for my own part, how the little mistress could be in a worse scrape!"

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Harcourt, again, sympathisingly; "and she is so pretty, and looks so modest."

"That is just it," said Charlie, laughing; "you will always find a modest woman gets lots more kisses than defiant-looking, impudent women. A man has not the courage to approach women who are always on their guard; but modest young women, who have no sort of idea that men would like to steal kisses from them, are sometimes besieged, and not unfrequently won. I conceive, now, that the modesty of that pretty little woman was at least half the reason why that great big Isaac Watson fancied her more than the fat red-faced woman, the landlady of the 'Packhorse;' for undoubtedly it would be very convenient for Isaac to become landlord there—he would be just in his element!"

Meanwhile the unconscious object of all this talk sat gazing out of the carriage windows, and wondering why she was separated from her companions. She had only been a prisoner in her own room two entire days; for on the second morning Mr. Gray sent her word that he should leave for Dartmoor by an early train the next day, and that she must hold herself in readiness for his summons."

Her heart leaped for joy. She should see Isaac. He would go down to Devon in the same train with her. He would seek her out; he would talk to her; he would comfort her. But when, on being taken to the station, she found herself consigned to the care of two ladies who were strangers to her, and kept entirely from her own people, even from the women from Lawsleigh, Mary's disappointment and mortification were great; and she could not smother a feeling of indignation against Mr. Gray, for, as she thought, such undeserved harshness.

Mary knew Mr. Charles Hill by sight, but she did not know either of the ladies. They did not speak to her; and so poor Mary sat sad and silent,

wondering when she should come to the end of her troubles, and why she was to be with the ladies, and why Isaac Watson never came to speak to her before the train started.

"By-the-way, I have forgotten to tell you," said Charlie, "you are forbidden to hold any conversation with that young woman! Bishop Lawsleigh" —it was thus he designated Mr. Gray—"will not permit it. You may give her something to eat, if you like, at Swindon, when we stop there—or at Exeter, before we start for the moor—but it is forbidden to put her into an interesting state of talk."

"What will be the penalty of disregarding these orders?" said Mrs. Hill.

"Nothing short of excommunication! The pains and penalties of the bishop's indignation would not suffice for the occasion! His lordship has a plan of his own; he means to convict the young woman from her own mouth, in the presence of his excellent curate, my trusty and right well-beloved father, William Hill!"

"Charlie, how absurd you are!" said Mrs. Hill, in English, and the unconscious object of so much care turned her pale face and looked at the speaker.

"I am sure she is innocent," said Mrs. Hill.

"So am I," said Mrs. Harcourt.

Both ladies spoke in French.

"So am I," said Charlie. "All modest women receive the first kiss innocently; and, as far as I am a judge, I do not think they become corrupted even by the first half-dozen!"

"Charlie, how foolish you are!"

The ladies left the train for a short time at Swindon, and took Mary with them into the refreshment-room. In crossing the platform some gentleman set his foot on Mrs. Hill's dress, and tore off a large piece of the trimming.

"How very tiresome!" said she, gathering her dress round her.

"I have my work-roll in my pocket," said Mary; "I can easily stitch the trimming on again, if you will allow me."

"You are very kind—thank you," said Mrs. Hill; "but come and eat some luncheon—do not mind my dress."

"I cannot eat, thank you," said Mary, disconsolately, for she had not seen a symptom of Isaac, even now that, by the stopping of the train, he

had an opportunity of finding her out and comforting her.

But Mary had not discovered that she was travelling express, and would therefore reach her destination many hours before the excursion train, which would bring Isaac and the remainder of the people from Lawsleigh.

"You cannot eat!—but you must try," said Mrs. Hill kindly, as she saw Mary's eyes filling with tears.

She placed some sandwiches and buns before her, and turned to talk to Mrs. Harcourt; while Mary, regardless of Mrs. Hill's "Never mind my dress," wiped away her tears, took out her work-roll, threaded her needle, and, stooping down, unperceived by Mrs. Hill, began to repair the fractured trimming.

Charlie came up to the ladies while Mary was thus employed; and after watching her steadily for a short time, he said, in a low voice,

"I do not marvel that Isaac Watson should admire that little woman; he has always been a man of taste, barring his taste for cider; and do look at her—she sews as deftly as a lady!"

The two ladies, turning, saw Mary on her knees, employed on Mrs. Hill's dress.

"Indeed you must try to eat some luncheon," said Mrs. Hill, attempting to withdraw her robe; "I cannot allow you to be so troubled."

"Employment is pleasureable to me," said Mary, as she raised her eyes to Mrs. Hill, "and I am not hungry."

"But you must eat—why are you not hungry?" said Mrs. Harcourt.

"Thank you, madam, I—I cannot eat," and again Mary's eyes filled with tears.

"But pray do not mind my dress; I am quite ashamed to give you so much trouble," said Mrs. Hill kindly, and again trying to pull the robe from Mary.

"But you may quite spoil your beautiful dress," said Mary, as she held it fast, "if I do not finish sewing on the trimming; and"—and she raised her eyes to Mrs. Hill—"I do so like to do it for you, if you will let me," added she, blushing deeply as she saw the notice she had attracted from the two ladies and Mr. Hill.

"I declare, Kate, I could kiss her myself," whis-

pered Charlie to his wife, as he put his hands in his pockets, and carelessly sauntered away.

"Tell us what it is that troubles you," said Mrs. Harcourt.

"We shall wish to befriend you, if we can," said Mrs. Hill.

"Thank you," said Mary, as her tears pattered quickly down; "I have not done anything—I mean, I could not help it."

Mary was thinking of that first stealthy kiss, which took her as much by surprise as Mr. Gray himself. The two ladies turned away for a second or two to hide their smiles. They both intuitively understood "that Mary could not help it."

"And who blames you, then," said Mrs. Hill, "if you 'could not help it,' whatever it was?" and she tried to look unconscious of any knowledge of the actual event. "If you 'could not help it,' you can hardly be to blame."

"Mr. Gray thinks it was all my fault."

"Thank you. How very nicely you have stitched up the trimming!" said Mrs. Hill, as Mary arose from her knees, and rolled up her working materials.

"And now you must eat some sandwiches," said Mrs. Harcourt, "and drink this glass of wine; I shall not let you refuse me—I see you are out of spirits, and this will do you good."

"And Mr. Gray, then, accuses you?" said Mrs. Hill.

"Yes; but, indeed, madam, I did not know of it."

Then Mary blushed, and cast her eyes down, as she felt she could not tell the ladies what she meant by "it." And as the ladies were much better informed on the subject than Mary was aware of, of course it followed that they were too well-bred to ask her to explain more fully.

"I did not know till it was all over," said Mary.

So short, so sweet a dream, to prove such a bitter reality on awaking!

"Now you must have some buns to take into the carriage," said Mrs. Hill, "for you have eaten nothing."

The bell rang, Mr. Charles Hill reappeared, and the ladies and Mary reseated themselves in the train.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT WAS SAID AT THE VICARAGE ABOUT MARY COPE AND ISAAC WATSON.

IN due course of time our travellers arrived at Lawsleigh; and Mary was not sorry to find herself safe in the interior of her own cottage, and free from the surveillance of any one.

She felt that the two ladies had a friendly feeling towards her, but she felt also how utterly impossible it had been to explain her position to them, and to tell them that, as she expressed it to herself, "it was all in such a little minute—Isaac's arm round her neck, and his great lips close to hers, quite before she knew; for she had only just time to shut her eyes, and then the door opened, all at

the same time, and Mr. Gray stood there looking at them."

Mary lamented that she had not had the courage to tell them this. She felt sure they would then have understood that it was not her fault. Though whether Mary Cope had any intuitive notion that other females had been taken by surprise just as she herself had been, at some time or other of their simple lives, the author does not think it necessary to declare.

"And what is all this hubbub about Mary Cope and Isaac Watson?" said Parson Hill, as the party from town were cozily seated at their fruit and wine after dinner, and the domestics had left the room.

"Isaac was surprised in the act of——"

"Do not let us have any more nonsense, Charlie," said Mrs. Hill interrupting; "and," continued she, turning to Mr. Hill, "if my opinion is of any value, that young woman will clear herself from all accusations against her."

"But what has she done?—of what is she accused?—and what has Isaac done? Surprised in some act! In what, pray?" said Mr. Hill.

The two ladies looked at each other. Mrs. Harcourt blushed, and Mrs. Hill smiled, as they both recalled the magnitude of Isaac's sin.

"You ask too many questions at once," said Charlie. "Put them singly, and you will get the whole truth."

"What has Mary Cope done?" said the vicar.

No one attempted to reply. Mrs. Harcourt felt the colour come brightly into her cheeks; she also felt Parson Hill was looking at her.

"Ah! the ladies know all about it, I see," said Parson Hill. "May I ask of you," addressing Mrs. Harcourt in very courteous tones, "what has Mary Cope done?"

"She told me she had not done anything," said Mrs. Harcourt; "and she also said 'she could not help it.'"

"Parson Hill stared; and Mrs. Hill took the opportunity of attesting the truth of Mrs. Harcourt's statement.

"Humph!" said the parson. "Poor Mary has 'done nothing'—hard to blame her for that—and she 'could not help it!'—worse still to blame her in that case—and what has Isaac done?"

"That was not your second question," said Charlie, with a mischievous look at Mrs. Harcourt.

"Oh! never mind asking such numberless questions," said Mrs. Hill, "for I assure you I quite think the young woman will get through her troubles with credit to herself."

"At all events, all womankind is kindly interested in her favour," said Parson Hill.

"It would be hard if we could not be kind and charitable to each other," said Mrs. Harcourt.

"And you believe Mary 'could not help it?'" said Parson Hill. And, after a few moments of silence, he looked very much surprised at the change in Mrs. Harcourt's countenance—who so well understood the meaning of the little word "it,"—at Mrs. Hill's attempts to hide her smiles, and at Charlie's suppressed laughter.

"Am I to be kept in the dark?" said the parson, looking from one to another. "I know you," addressing Mrs. Harcourt, "always stand up for your sex—but then I rely upon your words, for I am sure you would not deceive me," added he courteously.

"I have used the young woman's own words," said Mrs. Harcourt, so demurely as to cause an additional burst of laughter from Charlie.

"Poor Mary!" said the parson; "I should be sorry if she were to get into any scrape with Isaac Watson. And Gray seemed to hint at some love-making. Now, Isaac Watson was taken up with that silly little milliner woman who came to visit Mary. I thought he had more sense, and more taste. But love-making, or making love with Mary Cope, would be a very different thing."

"But what of that?" said Mrs. Harcourt; "so pretty and so modest a young woman must attract admirers."

"Quite unconstitutional," said Charlie.

"True, O queen!" said the parson; "but we opine, to be without a lover is better than to have an unworthy one. Unworthy—well, I rather mean unsteady. I must admit, in all truth, Isaac is not so unworthy as he is unsteady—it is a hard matter to give an honest opinion of the man. Sometimes I almost fear he is more than unsteady, that is, wavering—he is positively—positively——"

Carried away by his subject, and having a great

horror of any attention from Isaac to Mary Cope, the good vicar for the moment felt that he deserved the epithet 'drunken;' and yet, his natural kindliness towards Isaac, made him hesitate before pronouncing a word of such powerful significance; and he at length stopped, without finishing the sentence.

"Did Gray make any complaint of Mary to you, Charlie?" said the parson.

"He told Mary not to receive visits from Isaac Watson; in point of fact, he forbade Isaac to go to the house."

"Well, what then?"

"He came home unexpectedly—Gray, I mean, came home, and found Isaac and Mary together."

"You don't say so!" said the vicar in a tone of surprise.

"Yes; the grand scrape between the pretty schoolmistress and Isaac Watson," said Charlie, "is——"

"Don't, Charlie!" said Mrs. Hill.

"Is that Gray surprised Isaac Watson in the very act of kissing Mary Cope," said Charlie, unmoved by Mrs. Hill's words, or by her look of entreaty.

"Heavens and earth!" said the parson, pushing his chair back; "what *do* you mean, Charlie?"

"That is all," said Charlie, listlessly sipping his wine.

"That is all, indeed! I hope it is enough!" said the parson, now replacing his chair. "Isaac Watson!—umph!—and Mary Cope! Now you see, Charlie, all this comes of the Exhibition! I never did approve of it; and I am happy to remember, at this moment, that the proposal to take the school, the choir, the ringers, and all the rest of the people, *never* had my willing consent. It is true, I gave way—the march of the times required it at my hands. And a pretty march they have made of it—the people, I mean; no, not the people, but Gray—a pretty march he has made of Isaac Watson and Mary Cope. And if I could have foreseen that this grand march of the times had required at my hands such—such conduct between Isaac Watson and Mary Cope, I would not have marched with the times."

The vicar had pressed his hand heavily on the table while he was speaking; he now removed it suddenly as he leaned back in his chair, and all the

glasses seemed to tremble and shiver in a sympathizing sensitiveness with the vicar.

"I always said as I thought—that is, when I objected to Gray's proposal, I said, such people as the Lawsleigh people were much better at home on Dartmoor minding their own business. What business had they with the march of the times and the Exhibition? You see I was right—I *am* sometimes."

The ladies longed to escape from the room, but Charlie telegraphed to his wife to sit still.

"This is just what may be expected from such innovations, such turning of the world upside down. If the people had stayed quietly in Lawsleigh, as they ought to have done, and as they have done for centuries from generation to generation, this would not have happened."

Charlie insisted upon refilling his wife's glass after her long journey, and prevailed upon Mrs. Harcourt to have a slice of sweet cake.

"Do you think that Isaac Watson would have dared to touch Mary Cope here on Dartmoor? Do you hear me speak, Charlie?"

"I am no judge of these matters," said Charlie;

"though, to say the truth, she is a pretty, modest-looking young woman, and I do not marvel much at any one being tempted."

"Marvel! why what *are* you talking about? She is the gem of the whole village! Is that drunkard, Isaac Watson—for he *is* a drunkard!" continued Parson Hill, now that he gave full play to his anger, "is that disreputable drinking and smoking Isaac Watson to have the gem of the village?—to be allowed to marry Mary Cope? I say he shall *not*?"

"Perhaps he has no such intention," said Charlie.

"No such intention! Oh! he has intention enough," said the parson, in a sarcastic tone; "or how dares he to—to——"

"Even modest young women allow such liberties to handsome men occasionally," said Charlie; "and, as Isaac is handsome, I suppose Mary had not the heart to say no."

"Charlie, boy, don't talk nonsense," said the vicar, in a softened tone, as he bowed his head; "I am grieved."

And then, after a few moments of silence, he

seemed to remember that he had rather allowed his anger to run away with his courtesy, for he turned to Mrs. Harcourt and said,

"Now you must prove that you are charitable enough to excuse my unpardonable anger in your presence, and tell me what you think of this wine; it is some——"

"Indeed I should regret as much as yourself," said Mrs. Harcourt, interrupting him with an attempt to soothe his ruffled feelings, "if that pretty-looking young woman should make a bad match, or rather, I mean, marry a bad man——"

"Well, I *do* confess I am grieved about this business; I had hoped that you, Charlie, would bring me comfort, for I don't wish to condemn Mary if I can help it; and, to confess the truth, Gray's letters for this last day or two have been great worries."

"But, my dear sir," said Charlie, "you will of course see Mary Cope yourself, and give fair play to her own account of the thing. She says 'she could not help it.'"

"Fair play! Why, do you think I would condemn her unheard?"

"Oh! I don't mean that you have any wish to condemn her; but Gray is zealous, captious, and inexperienced, and sometimes, even in spite of his strong desire to do right, he does the very opposite."

"If I could only hear the exact truth," said the vicar—"I mean, without any of Gray's own opinions, such as he has given me in his letters, until I am so mystified, I can make neither head nor tail of the whole story."

"Then go to the young woman yourself," said Mrs. Hill.

"And would you have me credit her statement in opposition to Gray's?" said the parson.

"Oh! no; I do not know what Mr. Gray has said—at least, I know but little," said Mrs. Hill; "but the young woman distinctly said 'she had done nothing'—that is, nothing that could excite Mr. Gray's anger, if properly explained."

"Then why did she not explain?" said the parson.

"I conclude Mr. Gray would not listen to her," said Mrs. Harcourt.

"She has at least prevailed upon you ladies to listen," said Parson Hill, courteously.

"No, indeed; few could have said less than she. We have told you all we know, and we both feel sure that, though the young woman is under a cloud, it may be found eventually to possess a silver lining."

"Umph!" said the parson, as a smile flitted across his face, "I think Mary must have made a favourable impression upon you."

The ladies now left the room.

"Are you in league with the woman?—and ready to fight Mary's battles?" said the vicar, as he pushed the decanter to Charlie.

"My feelings are interested for the young woman," said Charlie, as he filled his glass, "and against Gray. She does not look like a guilty, but a sorrowful woman—my wife agrees with me; Mrs. Harcourt is of the same opinion."

"You all row in the same boat," said the vicar, in a pleasant tone; "I am glad to hear it. I am glad poor Mary has interested you all in her favour—and, Charlie, I *will* see Mary as soon as I can; she will tell the truth to me—indeed, she is a very truthful young woman. Gray is a good fellow, but, between ourselves, he is apt to be a little severe; and

then, as you say, he has had no experience; and, though I am sure I give him credit for the desire to do right, I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that he often does very wrong. It may be so in this matter, for I cannot think Mary guilty of such wickedness. She has always been a most modest and well-behaved young woman. And also, Charlie, boy, I feel that it is not possible—in point of fact, it is impossible—that Isaac Watson should dare to take such a liberty with my schoolmistress!"

And the vicar refilled his class, pushed the decanter to Charlie, and leaned back in his chair with a complacent smile on his face.

"Oh! but, excuse me," said Charlie, "we must believe something. There could not be such a hubbub for nothing."

"Well, what then?—what part do you mean to credit?"

"Why, about the kiss. I am afraid I quite believe that."

"You believe that, sir!" said the vicar in a tone of astonishment. "Now that, in my opinion, is the most unlikely thing of all. Why do you credit such nonsense?"

"Because it seems to be the only thing that probably did happen. And the young woman said 'she could not help it.' Of course she could not. You know that as well as I."

"Charlie! Charlie!" said the vicar shaking his head.

"And really, with a fair opportunity, I do not so much blame Isaac; because, with a fair opportunity, I should be very likely to—kiss her myself!"

"Pshaw!—nonsense, boy!" said the vicar, as he rose to lead the way to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER X.

WHICH TREATS OF MARY COPE'S EARLY MORNING VISITOR, AND OF WHAT WAS SAID ON THAT OCCASION.

AT six o'clock the next morning, after a good night's rest, considering the anxiety of her mind, Mary Cope opened her eyes, and was pleased to see what she called "the beautiful Lawsleigh sun" shining full into her room. She sprang out of bed, hastily rushed to the window, and opened it, and was in the act of fastening the casement back, when, to her surprise and delight, she saw Isaac Watson pacing up and down in front of her cottage.

"Oh, goodness me! Why, it is Isaac!" said she softly, as she withdrew from the window. It

is almost unnecessary to add that Mary's toilette was made more rapidly than usual; and when she was able to descend and open the door, she had no hesitation in letting Isaac enter.

When the joy of their meeting again had a little subsided, Isaac confessed he felt very angry with Mr. Gray. He could not understand why Mary must be separated from her own party, and go with the ladies by express train.

"The whole village of Lawsleigh," to use Isaac's expression, "had gone to town by excursion train, in third-class carriages; and why then should Mary be taken from them on their return journey?"

Of course Isaac Watson had a right to resent such interference on Mr. Gray's part.

Mary opened her eyes very wide, when the astounding fact was made known to her, that she had travelled express! She thought an express-train, and the telegraph, much the same sort of thing; and that if one could carry a message, as she had been told, thousands of miles in a minute, the other would allow passengers to get in at one end, and just shoot them out at the other, without any more trouble! And on learning from Isaac

that she had herself been in one of these very superior trains, she said with much *naïveté*,

"Then, Isaac, it is only smaller carriages they have in those trains—not so big as ours by many times over." By "ours," Mary meant third-class. "And then they are all armchairs and cushions, and no space to walk about, but like a very little room. 'Ours' are much more roomy, and pleasanter, and not so hot, and——"

"But then you went along the line much faster, Mary," said Isaac.

"Did I? I am sure I did not know it. Why, you see, Isaac, I was so unhappy, I really did not know what we were doing. It seemed all very slow to me, with nobody to speak to. I thought we never should get to Lawsleigh. I was very, very tired, and so I went off to bed directly. And when did you get home, Isaac? And how is the good widow?"

"Why, Mary, dear, I have not been to the smithy, for——"

"Not been to the smithy, Isaac!"

"No. I only reached Lawsleigh at half-past five. Many of our large party are not yet arrived;

and I came here at once to see you—because you see Mr. Gray puts himself so between us, that I wanted to talk to you—besides wanting to see you," added he, kindly, as he pressed her hand. "For as you and I, Mary, have agreed to have each other"—he had ceased to call her Mistress Cope —"I do not see the right of any one to come between us!"

Mary was silent, and Isaac proceeded.

"You see, Mr. Gray says—for I have had a talk with him—he says the parson will not let you marry me!—and so that is the reason why I so much wanted to see you. Because you *have promised* me; and besides, even the parson has no right to stop you from doing as you like in a matter that makes your happiness for life!"

"But, Isaac," said Mary, gently, and turning very pale, "how can I go against Parson Hill?—why, I could never think of such a thing!—you know he is my only friend, and he is so kind and good; and if I offended him, I must lose the school —and—that would make me very unhappy indeed. But I quite made up my mind that, as you have given up going to the 'Packhorse,' it must be all

right with Parson Hill, because what can he have to say?"

In the first moments of their happiness, when Isaac declared his love and Mary acknowledged hers, they had both referred to Parson Hill with great satisfaction, agreeing in opinion that, if Isaac would give up his constant visits to the 'Packhorse,' that kind Parson Hill would raise no objection to the marriage. But when they were so unceremoniously separated, and so systematically kept apart, each had opportunities for thinking over his or her position, and both had more doubts as to the smoothing of their future path—now that they met again—than they had had when they parted. In Mary it amounted to a dread of meeting with or seeing Parson Hill. In Isaac there arose the fear that Mary would be persuaded to break her word.

"Yes, Mary, I *have* given up the 'Packhorse,'" said Isaac, in a decided tone, "and I cannot see that the parson can now have any objection—only if he has, why, you know, I have your promise."

"Yes, you have," said Mary, looking up

brightly; "and, Isaac, I am glad that I have promised you, for I am always happy when I think about it; and you know we could wait—wait till —till Parson Hill is willing to—willing to give his consent—eh, Isaac?"

But somehow Mary had an awakening doubt that Isaac would not like to—wait! And often have I observed, in my walk through life, that in engagements of this nature the women, some of whom may have been restless in manner and eager for admiration before they were affianced—though this was not Mary's case—the women, when they are actually engaged, invariably settle down into a quiet and satisfied composure, that seems to express an inward happiness superior to any they have before known—a happiness that makes them equal to the suspense of waiting with exemplary patience, till fate shall order that such engagements shall terminate by marriage.

Not so the men. No sooner are they assured that they have gained the love of the woman they prefer, than they become irritated with the smallest thing that seems to rise up between themselves and the possession of the coveted object; and in too

many instances they ungenerously upbraid the woman for the presence of obstacles she has neither been instrumental in raising nor had the power to overcome. Intuitively, as it seemed, Mary comprehended this anomaly. She was contented to wait—to wait until her great patron Parson Hill would give his consent. But what of Isaac?—would he? Isaac felt his heart sink as he heard her words. His nature was generous, and he sincerely loved Mary Cope; and though an ardent admirer of pretty women, he was not one who would marry for beauty only. Mary possessed qualities of sterling worth, and Isaac appreciated them. The more he recognized her value, and the more he prized her love, the more he dreaded that she should, by connivance of any kind, be turned against himself—a fact that he feared might sooner or later be brought to pass.

Isaac thought little of the vice of inebriety when he left Lawsleigh; he returned with a horror of it, and also with a keen consciousness of the many humiliating positions in which he must frequently have been seen, not only by the inhabitants of the village, but also by Mr. Gray, and even by the

vicar himself! And another thing—he felt painfully conscious that his intention of giving up the "Packhorse" would not be credited!—and his regret was increased by the conviction that it would take many months, perhaps even years, to do away with the past and establish a character for soberness. He knew that his past misconduct might be brought up against him by any one who wished to prevent Mary from marrying him. And, after a pause, during which these thoughts flitted rapidly through his mind, he said,

"It is not about waiting that I mind so much—only the sooner we are married the less people can do to separate us—it is your word, Mary, your true word that you will not be turned against me—that is what I want."

"Turned against you!" said Mary, reproachfully. "Why, what do you mean, Isaac?—I should never think of such a thing."

"Dear Mary, I know you are so good," said Isaac, with rare caution, avoiding any explanation of the thoughts that had agitated him. "And I came here this morning, Mary—for I could not

rest until I had seen you—to ask you to give me your word that you will be true to me? I think if you will promise me that, I can settle my mind a little more easily."

Mary looked up at him with a fearless but rather inquiring expression of countenance, and paused before she replied,

"I listened to you, Isaac, when you said you loved me, and I did not doubt your avowal, though I was almost ashamed to feel how much I could return that love. This is only three days ago—you did not appear to doubt me then—why do you doubt me now?"

"I do not doubt you; if you are left to yourself, I know you will keep your word. But if anyone should try—try to speak ill of me to you—which perhaps they might, Mary—you might change your mind, and think me unworthy, as I know I have been; but I will do better—for your sake I will be anything."

"For your own sake, Isaac," said Mary, with a shade of reproach in her tone. "You must have a right principle within to cause you to stand against temptation. I am nothing," added she,

sorrowfully; "for if you only reform for my sake, your reformation will not be lasting."

"There!" said Isaac, starting up, "you doubt me—that is just what I expected!"

"If you doubt yourself, Isaac," said Mary, meekly, "how can you expect me to trust you?"

"I do not doubt my power to do anything I attempt in a right spirit. I have always been self-reliant—I am so still. But, Mary, I feel very humble, and sad-hearted, and unworthy of you; my past evil deeds are ever present with me, and then I fear they are also present with you. I am half-ashamed to ask you—come what may—to promise me faithfully that you will have me!—I feel as if I were taking an unfair advantage; and yet I feel my pulses stir within me, and my heart beat quicker, as I say you shall never repent—so help me God!" added he, fervently, as he raised his eyes upwards; "my anxiety about you fairly weighs me down," and he seated himself heavily, and disconsolately leaned his head on his hand.

"But, Isaac," and a very slight smile of contentment seemed to play about Mary's mouth, as she said, "I suppose you are not any worse now than

you were three days ago? You told me then of your past life, and I only honoured you the more for your straightforward honesty; you promised amendment, and I—I quite believe you will act up to your promise."

She held out her hand timidly as she spoke, though she could not restrain the crimson blushes that covered her face.

"God bless you, dear Mary!" said Isaac, as he seized the little hand, and drew her nearer to him. "No, I am no worse; but I get so afraid that you will repent, and you see I cannot settle my mind to anything. Somehow, just at that time when I spoke to you in London, I was so happy; I did not think of the many things that might happen to part us; and with Mr. Gray making such a fuss, and keeping you from me, and threatening that the parson will not let us marry, why, fairly I am more done up than I could have supposed from anything—and—and—and so, Mary, perhaps you will excuse me, and understand that only your promise can comfort me."

"I do not mean to change my mind, Isaac; and we both know how good the parson is, so I shall

just think of that, and not care about Mr. Gray; and if you were to do the same, Isaac, I do think you would be happier."

Undoubtedly Isaac was much comforted by Mary's eloquence, and walked home a much happier man. And the interview terminated to their mutual satisfaction, and without any disagreeable interruption at the finale.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW THE BELLS OF LAWSLEIGH RING FORTH A MERRY PEAL, AND YET FAIL TO MAKE PARSON HILL GLAD.

THE day after the return of the Lawsleigh people from the Exhibition, little knots were seen gathered together in different parts of the village, expatiating on the wonders of the "World's Fair," and on all the marvellous sights they had seen.

Mary gathered courage to go to the smithy; for now that she actually "kept company" with Isaac, she felt a degree of shyness in going there that was new to her Nevertheless she determined to go, for said she to herself:

"If I do not go people will talk about that, and

perhaps only the sooner find out about Isaac and me."

The Widow Simpson was enjoying the calm summer's evening, according to her wont, in the shed at the front; but Isaac was not there.

"Mistress Cope! And you be come back all safe! I be pleased to see you. Tell I, be it a weary way to London?—and what be the Bishion (Exhibition) like to?"

"The journey was rather long," said Mary; "it took us all the livelong day to get to London, and then it was quite late at night, and so until we awoke in the morning we could not tell a bit what London was like. But my goodness, widow, why, it would take a long, long life to tell what London is like! Such sights as we have seen! such places as we have been to!—I mean Crystal Palaces, all made of glass, widow!—and such queer live animals—or I suppose have once been alive—in the gardens!"

"My! Mistress Cope, but it be wonderful!"

"Wonderful! I think so, indeed! And the fountains outside, and the great Egyptians inside."

"Egyptians, Mistress Cope? What, then, be Pharaoh there, and all his host?"

"I should think there is everything there that you can ever have known about. And pictures, and naked people, like those in the Exhibition!"

"Naked, Mistress Cope? Can you be meaning stark naked people?"

"Well, widow, they are not alive, but they are very queer things to look at; and especially when Isaac was with me, it was most awkward, and I always wanted to get away."

"It be a shame, it sim to I, as they Londoners must let dead folk go naked!" said the widow.

"Oh! but then they never have been really alive, you know; they are made of marble, and, widow, you would think some of them could speak," said Mary, with a little awe, "but they cannot!"

"Isaac be almost fagged up," said the widow; "he be fast asleep, he was so dead a-tired."

"No doubt he requires rest, widow," said Mary, as she went into the cottage for a chair, and so managed to hide her blushes at the mention of Isaac's name.

"Now, widow, look here," continued Mary, as she opened a parcel and displayed her treasures, "these needles were made in the Exhibition—do look at them."

"They be uncommon fine."

"Oh! they are wonderful!" said Mary, enthusiastically. "And look at this wool, two colours together! Did ever you see the like? It is most marvellous! I have brought it for you, on purpose that you may knit yourself some nice warm muffatees, such as you wear in the winter; and here are the knitting-needles, just the right size."

"Why, bless thee, Mistress Cope! And just to think as you should go all the way to London town, and to the Bishion, and then think on I! Massy me, I be most mazed!"

"Think of you! why, to be sure! Did you think when I was in London I should forget dear old Lawsleigh? Oh, no, widow, I thought a great deal about it, I can tell you,"—and Mary looked round the shed as she thought of her engagement with Isaac,—"and about you also—and Isaac and I talked about you—for of course I

thought of you sitting here so nice, and still, and quiet. And did you like your nice new shawl that Isaac told me to choose for you? He was so pleased to buy one for you!"

"Maybe the lad be kind-hearted; and I sim he do love his granny. Though he be such un a big un, he have always loved his granny just as when he was a little one!"

And then the old woman took a good look at Mary; and after she had silently made up her mind, she said:

"And you sim to me, Mistress Cope, to be that hearty pleased. For why be you so glad?"

Mary could not hide her happiness; it shone in her eye, rippled over her mouth; was heard in her tongue; and the old woman's penetration observed these signs. But she was far enough from suspecting the real cause of such joy. She took up the wool, and, after examining it, she said,

"This be amazing curious yarn! Two fresh colours all in one!—it be amazing, surely!"

"Yes," said Mary, "that is the beauty of it, and when you knit with it the effect is admirable."

"It be kind of you, Mistress Cope, to bring I

this here wool, and it be kind of the lad to buy me a nice new shawl. But there be a table as the lad bringed home, so heavy, and with a box on the top, that be no use to I, and no use to nobody, but to stand in the way. The lad put it near by the window; will you go and look at it, Mistress Cope? It be a queer table, with queer legs."

Mary went into the cottage at the widow's request, and there, under the window, to her great astonishment, stood a sewing machine. Her exclamation of surprise and delight caused the old woman to lay down her knitting, and go into the cottage to see what was the matter.

"It is a sewing-machine!" said Mary, as she took off the lid, which the old woman had supposed was a box, and displayed the machinery underneath.

The glad sound of Mary's voice caused more intruders than one, for hasty steps were heard descending the stairs, and Isaac abruptly entered the room.

"Oh! Isaac, what a beautiful thing!" said Mary, as her eyes filled with tears of joy.

For she thought of his goodness to her in buy-

ing so expensive a present, and was half ashamed to feel how much this proved his love.

"Not half good enough or handsome enough for the one who, I hope, will accept it from me and use it to her own satisfaction," said Isaac.

"I never can thank you enough," said Mary eagerly, as she offered him her hand.

Isaac did not refuse the proffered hand, and, what was still more strange to the old woman, Mary did not turn aside from Isaac's proffered caress.

But, as it is not the custom, even on primitive Dartmoor, for great big men and pretty little women to be "billing and cooing" in the presence of their grandmothers, so these signs of attachment between the two young people seemed to be at once understood by the old woman, for she said in a tone of glad surprise,

"Why, children, be ye a-going to wed?"

"Mother, she is to be my wife," said Isaac, proudly presenting Mary to the old woman; "yes, it is true; she has promised to have me—have you not, Mary?"

"Perhaps the widow would not like you to marry me?" said Mary evasively.

"Not like! Mistress Cope, I be cruel glad, I be!"

And the widow kissed Mary, and stretched out her aged arms to touch the head of each as she said,

"May the Lord in heaven bless ye both, and make you good and happy!"

Isaac had stooped his tall person, for he intuitively comprehended that the widow would give them a blessing; and, as he arose from his humble position, he put his arms round her waist and hugged her close in his arms, kissing her tenderly, and whispering close in her ear,

"No more 'Packhorse,' mother, no more cider; you shall never again have to grieve for me, I promise you."

"God bless thee, lad!—ay, and he will bless thee, and help thee to keep thy word. And I be pleased, I be pleased, though, mayhap, I canna help to cry."

And as Isaac placed her in a chair, and turned away to hide the powerful emotion that stirred

within him, Mary and the Widow Simpson took the opportunity to wipe away their tears; for, as Mary said as she kissed the old woman,

"You see, widow, I am very pleased, and very happy, but somehow—somehow I cannot help the tears coming."

"And you be a-going to wed the lad Isaac, Mistress Cope? I be most mazed!" said the widow.

"I must confess I have promised him," said Mary.

"Heyday! lassie, and what hast thee been a-promising?" said James Marvel, who overheard Mary's words as he entered the cottage.

"Her has a-promised to wed the lad, and I be most mazed about she," said the widow.

"Oh-h!" said James, making a grimace, "then you be a-meaning to forbid the banns, widdy—be that it?"

"No, no," said the widow, hastily; "I have gived them my blessing, Mister Marvel, and that be it."

"Why, gude save us, Isaac, lad!" said James, looking at the sewing-machine; "I have a-seed

a thing like to that at the Bishion—doesna it cost a power of money, eh, lad?"

"Hark to it," said the widow, as Mary began to move the treadles. "I be a-thinking on a spinning-jenny, as I have a-heard tell of in my young days. Be this a spinning-jenny, Mistress Cope?"

"It is a beautiful sewing-machine," said Mary, enthusiastically. "I never heard a spinning-jenny, and I do not know what it is like."

The little party at the smithy was soon made larger by the addition of some other of the villagers, who had been in London, and who now came to tell the widow of all the wonders they had seen, and to compare their experience with Isaac's. As fast as the neighbours entered the cottage, the Widow Simpson informed them that "Isaac and Mistress Cope was a-keeping company," and the news seemed to give universal satisfaction. Some of the ringers were present, and they whispered to each other that it would only be fair to Isaac—who was himself such a capital ringer—if they were to just rush to the belfry and strike up a peal in honour of his engagement with Mary Cope.

"Just the very same," said one, "as us did when the passon telled us as Master Charlie was a-going to wed his missus as he has a-got now."

"The very same, lad," said another; "come along."

They got the keys of the church from the old woman, who was as much pleased with the idea as they themselves; and calling together the remainder of their companions as they went down the street, eventually reached the belfry, and sent forth a peal from the old church tower, such as the inhabitants of the quiet village of Lawsleigh were only accustomed to hear on grand occasions.

"My!—why for be the lads a-ringing like to that?" said one.

"Coz why?—us be all comed safe back to Lawsleigh," said another.

"They be a-finding out if the bells be all right," said another; "coz the ringers was all gone to London town, and mayhap they bells might go to sleep."

But when by degrees the real cause became known, congratulations in a simple though hearty

and friendly way were not wanting at the smithy cottage. It is true that there were some who shook their heads and said,

"Mistress Cope marry Isaac Watson! Why, and what be she a-thinking on? Cannot her see with her two eyes as Peter Barker be always a-wolloping Hannah, poor thing! And will Mistress Cope, and she such a little one, like to be wolloped by that there big Isaac Watson? My! her be fond!"

And at a part of the village that has been especially introduced to the reader, the dialogue ran thus—

"Mistress Cope!—Molly Cope you be meaning—and she with she's face all spoiled; leastways, it was spoiled when I seed she—be she a-patched up? Mayhap they big sores be not gone yet—be they?"

"She's face is not spoiled now, widdy," said old Jacob Smerdon, whose journey to London had not caused any reform in his habits, and who, unlike Isaac, had not given up his visits to the "Packhorse."

"Oh-h! she's face be bettered again, and she

be a-going to wed Isaac Watson; and if Isaac comes to gie it to she same as Peter Barker does to Hannah, will her like that? Done you think, Mister Jacob?"

The spite and angry feeling of the Widow Mason towards Mary Cope was not reciprocated by Jacob Smerdon, and he did not reply. Jacob was a kind-hearted old man, and rejoiced in the prospect of Isaac's happiness. He knew that Isaac had promised never to visit the "Packhorse" again; but he was too wise to anger the widow still more by informing her of Isaac's resolution.

Meanwhile, Mary had not seen either Parson Hill or Mr. Gray. The latter, like all who had returned to Lawsleigh by the excursion train, found rest especially necessary; and he did not leave his bed until obliged to dress for dinner at the vicarage, whither he had been invited by his hospitable vicar.

And Parson Hill himself had been prevented from seeing Mary as he had intended, and from hearing her own account of the reports which had reached him to her disadvantage, by the arrival unexpectedly of a large party of friends for a long

day on the moor. Such an influx of visitors was by no means unusual, but Parson Hill felt they had never arrived less opportunely.

Mary, with a beating heart, had called at the vicarage before going to the smithy, wishing, yet dreading, to see Parson Hill. But, as we have said, he was engaged, and Mary came away with her desire ungratified, but with a large portion of dread diminished, for, in a group of ladies on the lawn, she saw her late companions in the train, Mrs. Harcourt and Mrs. Hill, who both came forward and spoke to her, and their kind manners and their kind inquiries set her heart at rest, for she thought,

"If these two ladies are so kind, I do not think Parson Hill can be meaning to blame me much."

And not feeling to deserve the blame that had been so unsparingly heaped upon her, Mary felt happier than she had done since the unlucky moment of Mr. Gray's intrusion upon that "little minute," as Mary called it, when "it" happened, that she could neither foresee nor prevent. And so Mary felt herself quite at liberty to enjoy the evening at the smithy cottage, with all its at-

tendant honours of good wishes from so many of the villagers, bells ringing and, though last, not least, Isaac's splendid gift of the sewing machine.

And the dinner at the vicarage went on much as all dinners do. But the conversation was suddenly stopped in its even flow by the bursting forth of a joyous peal from the old church tower.

"Heyday!—what is all this for?" said the vicar, putting down his knife and fork, and gazing round inquiringly.

No one could reply. One of the domestics was sent to the housekeeper to inquire if she knew why the bells were ringing. But the man returned as he went, without any solution to the enigma.

"Strange!" said the worthy vicar, looking perplexed.

"The men ought not to ring without asking your permission," said Mr. Gray.

"Oh! they know their duty," said the parson; "they know the times and seasons when the Church commands the bells to be rung; and as they always do ring on those occasions, I am sure they are wel-

come to ring on any other, without the trouble of asking my permission."

"But they ought not to think it a trouble to ask you; and, besides, it is their duty," said Mr. Gray.

"Perhaps they are ringing for joy at their return home," said Charlie.

"It may be so," said the vicar.

The bells ceased their joyous strain, and the incident was forgotten. But later in the evening, when the assembled party were sitting rapt in motionless silence, listening to Mrs. Harcourt's magnificent playing of one of Mendelssohn's "Lieder ohne Worte," a servant entered and spoke to Parson Hill in a low voice. He said,

"The bells have been rung, sir, because Isaac Watson and Mistress Cope are engaged to be married. There has been a large party at the smithy cottage, sir; all the villagers have been to congratulate them; James Marvel is just come in."

The good vicar leaned back in his chair, and for a few moments covered his face with his hands.

When Mrs. Harcourt left the piano, amid the compliments of her friends, she missed Parson Hill's voice; but this did not prevent her from observing that he looked paler than usual, and absent in mind.

"What is the matter with the vicar?" said Mrs. Harcourt to her friend Mrs. Hill.

"He has discovered the meaning of the joyous peal," said Mrs Hill.

"It might be joyless instead of joyful," said Mrs. Harcourt.

"Isaac Watson and our pretty travelling companion are actually engaged, notwithstanding all Mr. Gray's care; and, as Isaac is head of the belfry, in compliment to him, the ringers gave him a right merry peal."

"Poor Parson Hill!" said Mrs. Harcourt.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH TREATS OF THREE WIDOWS.

WHEN the last of the carriages drove away from the hospitable Vicarage of Lawsleigh, and stillness seemed to occupy the house, in opposition to the Babel of tongues that had been so recently heard, Parson Hill led the way to his library, followed by Mr. Gray.

"Well, Gray, this is indeed a sad affair," said the vicar.

"I was afraid it would turn out so," said Mr. Gray. "And I cannot see how we can expect it to be otherwise, after that young woman's most shameful deceit."

The vicar was silent.

"I wrote you word, Mary Cope told me most

distinctly on one evening that she and Isaac Watson were not engaged, and not going to be married; and on the next I saw Isaac with his arm round her neck kissing her."

"Bless me!—bless me!" said the vicar, shaking his head.

"Oh, she must be very bad to permit such a thing," said Mr. Gray, angrily; while Parson Hill moved uneasily in his chair, without making a reply. But after a few moments' silence, and perhaps feeling it incumbent on him to say something, he said,

"And now they seem to take things into their own hands—ringing the bells, and engaging themselves without saying a word to anybody! I cannot think what has come to the place! Lawsleigh used to be the most quiet village on the moor, and its people the most obedient; and now, here is Isaac Watson, the drunkard, going to marry Mary Cope, the school-mistress. A pretty thing, indeed!"

"Perhaps we can prevent the marriage," said Mr. Gray.

"They are both of age. You may be sure that

sinner, Isaac Watson, knows that well enough; and you may also be very sure that he will instil that fact into that simpleton, Mary Cope—for she is a simpleton, and worse than a simpleton, for having anything to do with such a worthless character as Isaac. I *can not* think what the young woman can be thinking of. If I could save her from the consequences of her own folly—if she would listen to me—let me save her"—the vicar paused, and leaned his head on his hand. "Poor thing! Can we save her, Gray, from becoming the wife of a sot?"

"If they are both of age, I fear we have but little chance; and yet, though the young woman was so deceitful with me, she might listen to you—at all events, it would be well worth an effort, both from you and from me, to try to save her," said Mr. Gray.

"You see, Gray, I shall always feel sure, if they had not gone to London, this could not have happened. As I have said before, such innovations do no good; and here we have under our very noses proof of much harm done."

"I don't agree with you there. I think these

two, Isaac Watson and Mary Cope, were very intimate—indeed, a great deal too intimate—before they left Lawsleigh."

"Too intimate! But we will not discuss that now," said the parson, regretting that he had mentioned the journey to town. "And it is getting late," added he, as he put his hand to his brow. "I am detaining you from the repose that I am sure you must require after all you have undergone in London. Perhaps you will see me in the morning?"

"Yes, I will—for the sooner we come to some conclusion—that is——"

"You see, Gray, we are both tired to-night," said the vicar, with an attempt at a smile. "You with so much sight-seeing in London, and I with the pleasure of receiving so many dear old friends." And as he went with Mr. Gray to the hall-door, he added—"How magnificently Mrs. Harcourt plays!—does she not? That *is* music!"

"You are a better judge than I," said Mr. Gray, as he shook the vicar's hand, and went away.

"Umph! It is my positive belief that Gray

would not know John Bull's 'God save the Queen,' from Mendelssohn's finest work. Well, well, some men are born without—without—but never mind that. She is a charming woman. She *can* play. I know a great many who can *not*—who make many attempts, and think they shine. I wish they would just listen to Mrs. Harcourt for one ten minutes! If that did not cause them to comprehend their own inferiority, nothing upon earth would. Conceited things!—females—ladies, I mean."

And in spite of the vicar's sorrow for the sad entanglement of his favourite schoolmistress, Mary Cope, with that sinner Isaac Watson, he laughed aloud at his own complimentary speeches to ladies.

On this same evening, while the vicar and Mr. Gray were conversing in the library, Charlie entered his wife's dressing-room, and said,

"It is my opinion that those two lovers will beat the governor and the curate all to nothing."

"I don't understand you, Charlie," said Mrs. Hill. "What have they done?"

"I have not any information to communicate, of particular acts done or committed by them,"

said Charlie, laughing; "but I learn that they have taken the very wise precaution to make their engagement known to the whole parish. And as Gray is considered by the parish an interloper, and as not belonging to it; and as the governor, since Gray's arrival, is become pretty nearly a cipher in it, it stands to reason that the parish will have the best of it, and probably insist upon marrying the poor things—just as it insisted on ringing the bells in their honour—and just for the sake of opposing themselves to Gray. By themselves I mean the people in the parish—and just because the parson is of no use at all—eh! Kate? What do you say to this?"

"You mystify me," said Mrs. Hill, quietly.

"That is not difficult," said Charlie.

"But what is the use of making such long speeches, and mystifying me? If you have anything to tell me—tell me—if not——"

"Cut your stick! Very well, I will go," said Charlie, as he walked away; and then, turning ere he reached the door, he added, "But have you nothing to tell *me* about your charming friend?"

"Oh! Charlie, dear, that *is* delightful!" said

Mrs. Hill enthusiastically; "beyond all doubt that will be a match!"

"I thought so," said Charlie, as he closed the door and re-entered the room. "An excellent match!" added he impressively; "the very match of all others upon which I have long set my heart—in point of fact, Kate, if anything could have made me more in a hurry to marry than I really was, this thought would have done it—I mean the thought that the governor would not propose to Mrs. Harcourt because he had a son living at home of a—a proper age to marry. And so you see, Kate, barring the love I had and have for you—which overtopped all other loves ever known in the world—I had a longing that the dear old governor should make his dear old self comfortable for the rest of his amiable and valuable life, and so marry Mrs. Harcourt, for the sake of making her comfortable for the remainder of her very elegant—very intellectual—and very excellent life; to say nothing of her music! which just touches the blessed old governor in the right place, and makes his dear old face gleam all over with smiles, and—well, to tell you the truth, dear Kate, I forget all

the rest—excepting only that I just married you, to take myself out of the way of the governor and Mrs. Harcourt—and—and I thought *you* would make *me* happy for life."

"Has Mr. Hill opened his mind to you?" said Mrs. Hill.

"Well, Kate, after my long and heartfelt speech about everybody's comfort in this comfortable world, I expected something a little more *recherché* than that; but since you have asked the question, I reply—Catch the governor opening his mind to any one, until he has first opened it well out to Mrs. Harcourt, and she in return has laid bare her 'inmost soul' to him. Sly old fellow, Kate, though I do worship him so hugely, for he is worth it! But to my certain knowledge he has had Mrs. Harcourt in his appropriating eye for the last twelve months!"

"Twelve months, Charlie! then why do not they marry? I suppose there is no such obstacle to the union of Parson Hill with Mrs. Harcourt, as there is between poor Mary Cope and her handsome lover," said Mrs. Hill laughing.

"Oh! now you are indeed sentimental," said

Charlie; "but honestly, I cannot accuse the parson of inebriety; and as an equal piece of honesty, I now add, I know no ill of the widow, nor do I know of any obstacle to their blessed union. And if the parson chose to call his own banns for three Sundays in Lawsleigh Church, joining the handsome widow's name with his revered own, I declare, again honestly, I would not forbid the banns."

"Charlie, Charlie, don't be so absurd!" said Mrs. Hill, as she again could not restrain her mirth.

"There you go again, Kate—never contented with my sentiments!" said Charlie, as he leaned his back against a wardrobe and put his hands in his pockets. "But now, Kate, I must say—and by way of looking the transaction fully in the face—I must say that, for a woman of a certain age, the Widow Harcourt has points that I appreciate and approve; and I do not hesitate to acknowledge that, even in his mature age, the governor has excellent taste. She is still good-looking, or rather one can see she has been handsome. She is always lady-like and well-bred—to say nothing of possessing a fund of information unusual with her sex. She is

frequently witty in conversation, and this without overstepping the bounds we men think necessary to hedge round female propriety—she is an intellectual and charming woman, and I just wish her joy of the governor!"

"I agree with all you say, Charlie dear, but you have forgotten or overlooked the best point of all. She *is* so warm-hearted!"

"Warm-hearted, Kate! but we men conclude that of all women, widows especially. Just imagine a cold-hearted woman!—an unheard-of anomaly! My dear Kate, the men would feel themselves justified in throwing stones at her as she attempted to take her daily walks. And a cold-hearted widow would be utterly impossible; widows are always——"

"Why do you say 'widow?'" said Mrs. Hill, interrupting. "Can you not say 'Mrs. Harcourt?'"

"Widow is a title common to all women who have lost their husbands. I only give her the title to which she has a right. And by way of enlightening you on this subject, I may as well tell you that there are two well-known widows in

Lawsleigh—the Widow Simpson, a good widow, and a lone woman; and the Widow Mason, a bad widow, and also a lone woman. You perceive, Kate, all widows are lone women. The Widow Harcourt is a lone woman, and she has as much right to the title of 'widow' as either of these I have mentioned, or even as the beautiful and unfortunate Widow Capet."

"Charlie," said Mrs. Hill, in a voice of consternation, "pray do not recall such horrible scenes!"

"What a vivid imagination you have, Kate! And so you really do remember all about poor Marie Antoinette? Now, between ourselves, I expected you to put the question, '*Who* is the Widow Capet?' But I was just going to add, and will still keep my intention, even at the risk of giving your fine nervous system a shock, that the Widow Capet lived and died a lone woman! Widows, as a rule, are only lone women as long as they are let alone; and therefore your charming friend, the Widow Harcourt, will, in all probability, soon lose all claim to her present title; for you will see, Kate, the dear old governor will not 'let her alone,' and then she will cease to be a lone woman!"

Mrs. Hill was by this time laughing almost convulsively, as she leaned back in her chair; but, rallying a little, she said:

"Do go, Charlie dear, I really cannot bear any more nonsense to-night—you quite take my breath away."

"And so that is all the thanks I get!" said Charlie, as he prepared to obey his wife's wish. But ere he reached the door, a gentle tap was heard. "Here is another visitor," said he, as he opened the door and allowed Mrs. Harcourt to enter. "Talk of the angels and they flap their wings!" said Charlie, as he closed the door, and left the two ladies together.

"Widows have many privileges," said Charlie, when he returned to his wife's apartment; "and I hope the Widow Harcourt has made good use of her privilege of *entrée* into my wife's dressing-room. "One A.M., as I am a living sinner," continued he, as he stood winding up his watch. "What could she have to say, Kate?"

"She says there is nothing between her and Mr. Hill."

"Who said there was? I am very sure I never

suspected the governor—and more, I am sure I never had such a thought of the lady!"

"Thought of what, Charlie?" said Mrs. Hill, yawning.

"Nay, Kate," said Charlie, laughing, "you look up in my face and tell me there is nothing between——"

"Oh! Charlie, I am really too tired for any more nonsense," said Mrs. Hill, interrupting him; "but dear Mrs. Harcourt says there is no engagement between her and Mr. Hill."

"Humbug! If there is not now, there will be. She knows that; all women are by nature endowed with the gift of—not second sight, but—foresight, widows especially. And this particular Widow Harcourt most plainly foresees that the governor will ask her to have him, although, like a woman and a widow, she cannot help humbugging her own sex! Well, Kate, you must have given the Widow Harcourt all your smiles, for you give me nothing but yawns. But while we are on this subject, it strikes me that Lawsleigh is a highly-favoured place, inasmuch as it contains at this present time three widows! A

bad one—we always give precedence to the worst; a good one—good people always come off second best; and a charming one—charming people always attract, and it is their own fault if they do not accept what is placed before them."

"I cannot quite understand her," said Mrs. Hill.

"The governor can, but she has humbugged you."

"She only denies the fact of any engagement."

"She keeps you in the dark, until it suits her widowship to throw light upon the subject. Oh! Shakspeare! he says, 'Put out the light, and then——'"

CHAPTER XIII.

SUNRISE AT LAWSLEIGH.

AND the sun arose over the village of Lawsleigh in the same old-fashioned way. Thousands of years had he gilded the tops of the Tors on Dartmoor—thousands of years had he marched on the same untiring round. A famous "mill-horse" is the sun. He is never weary—a steady-going one, too, for he never changes his pace; and if he does sometimes conceal his bright face under a cloud, and thus sadden the hearts of his worshippers, there are also occasions when he rises, as it were, with a halo round his head, and at such times he sheds light, life, and glory upon the hearts of all.

And this was one of those exceptional risings,

when he heralded his approach by gorgeous hues, and sent the stars to bed in a pitiless way, almost as if he were jealous of them; for he must see how they shine, and sparkle, and scintillate, and run along the blue arch of heaven—it may be on a visit to each other—and attract the notice of many more eyes than those of the well-known sage,

"Through his star-glass peeping love;"

and this knowledge may call forth jealous feelings on the part of His Majesty the Sun.

But on this especial morning he seemed to have some great work to perform; and no doubt there was a loud fanfaron of trumpets heard by the angels as his kingship approached the Tors of Dartmoor, for, as I have said, he came in all his splendour, and the Tors, from the distance at which I had the pleasure of seeing them, might have been supposed to be laughing for joy.

At the Vicarage Mrs. Harcourt opened her eyes just as the sun touched the top of Sharpitor.

"Dear me! the sun has risen," said she, as she sprang out of bed, and threw open the window.

She wrapped herself in a dressing gown, and seated herself to enjoy the spectacle.

The sun came steadily on—if slowly, he seemed to make good his progress; he seemed, too, to be in the humour to make the whole moor look bright and beautiful. No pen can describe the charm of his gradual march forward; but few, if any, pencils depict so wild and magnificent a scene.

Mrs. Harcourt was an admirer of fine scenery, and she gazed upon the splendid view, as it gradually opened to her, with the eye of an artist, and the appreciation of an intellectual mind. Soon all nature began to stir, but Mrs. Harcourt still kept at her post. She saw the "early birds" gathering up the worms; she heard the voice of "proud chanticleer" answering from homestead to homestead, and the distant lowing of the kine coming up to be milked; she saw the curling smoke rising up from a cottage here and there, and heard the tread of the labourers going to their work. She watched the bright sun still steadily pursuing his course, and gilding all things that it pleased him to touch, and she smiled. A sunny smile rippled from the corners of her pretty mouth up to her handsome eyes. She pushed away the luxuriant hair that, bursting from its slight confinement, fell

over her face, and obscured her vision, and she said to herself,

"I declare the sight of this glittering sun, and this exquisite moor scenery, and the noise of these homely sounds, quite gladden my heart."

She sat apparently enjoying the scene for some-time, then, suddenly turning, her eye rested on a table near, upon which lay letters.

"Ah! I remember," said she—"I put the letters in my pocket because I had not time to read them when they were delivered; and really, when I came to bed, I was too tired. I know what they are about—the same eternally wearing subject. One from Sophia, and one from 'dear Carry.' Ah! I did not see this was from Carry, or I am sure I should not have waited so patiently to know what it contained," and she opened the letter.

Mrs. Harcourt seemed to read with much inward satisfaction, until she came near the end; then her countenance changed, and she looked sad. When she had finished, she sighed deeply, and seated herself, leaning her elbow on the table, and her head on her hand. The part of the letter that

caused this change in Mrs. Harcourt, we will transcribe for the benefit of our readers.

"And so you really are going on a visit to Lawsleigh!—I rejoice at this, it will be a very agreeable change for you. And for me—I have, ever since I knew of your intention, been weaving the most charming romance, building my castles in the air, and saying to myself at least a hundred times a day, 'How thankful I am that my dear friend has so good a chance of—of a good husband, a charming home, and a peaceful, happy life.' I implore you, do not throw away such treasures, do not let the mournful past intrude upon your chance of a pleasant future. But write as soon as—as you can tell me I am a true prophetess, and as much sooner as you please."

After a short time spent in thought, Mrs. Harcourt opened a second letter.

"My dear, darling Mary," so the letter began, "and how do you get on?—I quite expected to have heard from you before this. I long to know how you were received, though I feel sure most warmly. I am very much engaged this morning, but I cannot help telling you how impatient I am

to hear from you; and I beg of you, my dear Mary, not to keep me one moment in ignorance of your future happiness, which I cannot but feel sure is already in your own hands. You know I have but one wish—to see you placed once more in a home of your own, and in that position of life to which, both by birth and education, you have a claim.—With much love, I am your fond sister,

SOPHIA."

But we have said as much of Mrs. Harcourt at this time as our space will admit.

Now the worthy vicar of Lawsleigh rested in an apartment looking westward; consequently he did not see the sights that have been described, and he therefore remained asleep for a full hour later. When he awoke, he felt heavy-hearted and unhappy—an unusual feeling with Parson Hill.

"What is the matter?" said he to himself. "Ah! I remember—it is all owing to that abominable Exhibition, and taking the villagers from Lawsleigh to London. What business had they there?—Dartmoor born—men, women, and children, careering off to a 'World's Fair!' I always

did object, and I am very glad I did. I never could see that any good was to be gained by such people going to such a place. I was right—I *am* sometimes!"

And then, after a pause, and referring to Mary Cope, he said,

"I am sure I cannot tell how to save the young woman; and what horrible dreams I have had—Isaac and Mary both as drunk as fiddlers; Gray dancing a hornpipe, or Spanish fandango—much the same sort of thing, I suppose—and Mrs. Harcourt looking on, with a pipe in her mouth. One cannot help laughing at the absurdity of dreams! But even that last perversion of the *bienséances* of life, and of Mrs. Harcourt in particular, must have been conjured up in my distempered brain by Gray's parting blessing;" and after again pausing for a few minutes, he added in an impatient tone, "I *do* really believe that man has no more soul for music than a pig!—and such music!"

Mary Cope opened her eyes when the sun had made good his entrance into her sleeping-room.

"It is a bright morning, I see," said she, drowsily;

and then rousing herself, she added, "Why, how I have been sleeping!—goodness me!—but I must stir myself. Ah! now that is because I am so happy—so very happy, and so I have almost slept myself away."

Mary forgot that the fatigues and anxieties of the many days previously to her return to Lawsleigh had prevented sleep; and now that her mind was restored to its former contentment, the body would indemnify itself for its past exhaustion, and re-establish its customary energies by a double portion of "Nature's sweet restorer."

While making her toilette, her mind still clung to the events of the past week, and the probabilities of the next day or two. She no longer dreaded to meet the good vicar of Lawsleigh; she relied on his well-known desire to create all the happiness in his power, and she thought with pride on Isaac's promise to refrain from visiting the "Packhorse," and of her own joy in informing the parson of this unexpected resolution on Isaac's part.

Isaac Watson was one of those who saw the sun make his earliest approach to Dartmoor—who saw

him on the tops of the Tors, picking out first one, then another, from the darkness, and giving to each a crown of light.

And Isaac Watson arose and went to his shed; so that if, among the sounds Mrs. Harcourt was conscious of hearing, she had also heard the strokes of Isaac's heavy hammer as he occasionally used it, there would not have been much to marvel at.

"I am a changed man," said he as he worked away, "and I pray that I may be strengthened in my wish to throw off all that is disgraceful, and in the future live a more healthful life and be a better Christian. Somehow I feel sadly downhearted. Mr. Gray is not the most kind of parsons; he is so hard upon the past—as if I could undo it," continued he with a little sneer. "I can alter my conduct, I can blot out the bad past by the better present if he will let me, but I cannot have the past thrown at me. Some men seem to think the past never dies! Nor does it in one sense," added he, mournfully, "but if a man cannot have the hope of becoming a decent member of society, I say it is very discouraging! And it is a marvellous

thing that the very best of men give the least encouragement! They seem to take for granted, because one's career has not been perfect, that it can never amend. Ah! well," sighed Isaac, "that is because they themselves were born good; or—no, I mean they must always have led lives of peace and goodness. But if it had ever happened to such men —to have—well, I mean to have been accidentally drunk and disorderly, they would know how ashamed a man feels, and how glad he would be to reform, and how grateful for the notice of good men. Whereas, they do not believe it possible that a man can reform! And this hardness of belief on their part tends to prevent reformation! I am sure of it," added he as he worked the harder. "A man wants hope and the countenance of good men, but these are the very men who keep him down, though they do not know it. No, they mean to do right, and so, more is the pity that it turns out wrong. Here is the good Parson Hill; it is my belief he will not hear a word I have to say; and I am almost out of my wits with the thought that he will not let Mary have me. I know I shall not be able to stand any nonsense. If the parson will

only take me and Mary by the hand, and believe that we will never go to the 'Packhorse' again—that is, I mean I will never go—not she, poor thing, God bless her!—then—then I feel I can do anything—anything! I will alter the old house—the dear old Smithy Cottage—I will build a new room out there by the garden, and a bedroom over, and I will——"

But here we leave Isaac to his twinges of remorse for the past, and his small hope of happiness in the future.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT PARSON HILL SAID TO MARY COPE.

MARY went to the school and received her pupils in the usual manner. She kept up the ordinary routine as if she had not been absent from Lawsleigh one day. She was somewhat surprised, as the morning proceeded, to find she had the work all to herself; neither Parson Hill nor Mr. Gray appeared to assist her. But just at twelve o'clock, as she was in the act of dismissing the last of the children, she saw the vicar within a few paces of the door.

"Good morning, Mary," said he as he entered, "and so you are safe back from London?"

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir," said Mary as she

met him with a beaming smile, "I never had such a treat in my life, and I am so much obliged to you."

Whether the parson wanted to put Mary at her ease, or whether he was staving off the disagreeable moment as long as possible, does not much signify. Certain it is, he asked her many questions about her visit to town, drew from her what she had seen, and where she had been. All of which Mary narrated in her customary simple way, but with more joyousness of manner, and with a countenance more intelligently expressive, than he remembered to have seen before.

The fact was, the happiness of Mary's heart shone like a halo over all she said and did; but at length Parson Hill suddenly introduced the subject that had all along been uppermost in his own mind by saying,

"What is all this about you and Isaac Watson?"

Mary blushed a very charming blush, conscious that there was "a something" that gave her a great deal of pleasure, but that somehow or other was difficult of explanation to a third person.

Mary therefore cast down her eyes and remained silent.

"Well, Mary, what *is* all this about you and Isaac Watson?"

Mary heard the change of tone in Mr. Hill's voice as he repeated the question, and her happiness seemed to flee from her in an instant. She turned very pale, and still she did not speak.

"I am told—but mind, Mary," and now the vicar's tones again became kind—"I do not believe it!"

Poor Parson Hill!—he must have forgotten the peal from the church tower of only the preceding evening.

"I do not—I can not think so ill of you. Now, Mary, listen to me. I am told you are going to be married to Isaac Watson—is it true?"

"Yes, sir," said Mary, in a low voice, and not daring to raise her eyes.

"To Isaac Watson the drunkard!" said the Parson, in an angry tone.

"Oh! sir, he is not a drunkard!" said Mary hastily.

"Not a drunkard! Do I hear aright? Is

Mary Cope, the schoolmistress of the village of Lawsleigh, able to say with truth—with truth, Mary—that Isaac Watson is *not* a drunkard?"

And, after a pause of a minute or two, for Mary did not reply, he added,

"Why, you have seen him come reeling down the village street hundreds of times, and you only just escaped having your own brains knocked out by his heavy hammer in one of his drunken fits! And you know if he, and such as he, did not pollute this quiet village with their presence, that the Widow Mason might seek something else to do, for the 'Packhorse' would not pay for its stabling."

Mary now began to wipe away her tears.

"And that reprobate, Isaac Watson, is not a drunkard! What is he, then?—can you tell me that?"

"Oh! sir," said Mary, between her sobs, "he has promised never to go to the 'Packhorse' again."

And feeling that this asseveration must at once disarm the vicar's anger, she ventured to raise her eyes to his.

"Promised!—promised!—and you believe him!"

"Yes, sir—certainly, sir," said Mary, now with some return of her customary calmness; for she did not suppose that even the vicar himself would doubt Isaac's word.

"Why, you foolish young woman, he has only promised that to secure you!"

Mary did not quite understand what Mr. Hill meant, and wisely remained silent.

"I tell you he has made you a promise he has no intention of keeping!"

"Oh! sir, I am sure he will keep his word," said Mary, impressively.

"You seem suddenly to have found a very sturdy opinion of your own," said the vicar, with the authority of one whose counsel had hitherto been undisputed; "this comes of your going to London—I never did approve of it, and, now I see the results, I heartily wish I had never consented to so foolish a freak."

Mary, who thought the going to the Exhibition was as much Parson Hill's doing as Mr. Gray's, was again at a loss to understand his meaning, and remained silent.

"I tell you this drunkard, Isaac, has made you this promise to gain his own ends—to gain his own ends—do you understand me?"

"Why, sir," said Mary, thus forcibly appealed to, "I do not myself see what he has to gain—but perhaps, sir, you know better than I—only——"

"You foolish little thing, you do not see what he has to gain!"

"No, sir," said Mary, simply; "to be sure," added she, as if to shew the parson her innermost thoughts, "I have a few bits of furniture, but that is nothing—nothing at all, sir, to compare with what Isaac has got—if not in furniture," said she, as she thought of the poorly furnished Smithy Cottage, or rather, poor according to her preconceived ideas—"in trade, and in houses, and in——"

"Oh—h—h!—so then you are going to marry him for his wealth?"

"For what, sir?" said Mary, meekly

"Why, for his houses, and his lands, his high position in the village, and his—his flattering tongue!"

"No, sir, I never thought about these things.'

"Mary! Mary!" said the parson, in a tone of compassion, for he thought she did not speak the truth. "Then why, pray, do you enumerate them to me with such an air of grandeur, if they have never entered into your calculations?"

"Indeed, sir, I beg your pardon," said Mary, modestly, but earnestly, as an expression of pain flitted across her face. "I understood you to say —'Isaac had promised me not to go to the "Packhorse," that he might by our marriage gain what I possess;' that is, you see, sir, my books and furniture; and so, sir, I wanted to show to you that that could hardly be the case, because he is so much better off than I; but I assure you, sir, I never thought of these things when Isaac first spoke to me."

"Umph!—but you seem now to awake to the fact that you will have the best of the bargain if you marry this reprobate!"

Again Mary cast down her eyes, and did not reply—in her "heart of hearts" she had awoke to that fact, and this very conversation with Parson Hill had helped to convince her she had "the best of the bargain,"—ay, and much the best of the

bargain! And as Isaac's handsome face and manly form rose unbidden to her mind's eye, her face glowed with the brightness of her hopes, and she remained silent.

"Why, child, if you had nothing in the world, not even your furniture, he would promise to you; this reprobate would *promise* you anything, just to gain you for his own purpose!"

"Would he, sir!" said she, smiling and blushing brightly, but without the most remote idea that the parson meant her to understand Isaac's "promise" would not be kept.

"You silly young woman!" said the vicar, angrily, "cannot you understand—all the man wants is yourself!"

Mary's smile did not fade, and Parson Hill now, losing all patience, added, still more sharply,

"And I almost feel inclined to think, by your looks, that you *would* give yourself to him, and still think you had the best of the bargain!"

A woman has no idea of her own value; at least, in a case of this sort, where she is very young, and has been properly nurtured. Mary turned away. Thought is rapid, and Mary felt

in an instant how very much Isaac must love her. Even Parson Hill, who was so clever, and knew everything, even he said, "All Isaac wanted was herself!" She had nothing of value to place against his comparative wealth and position. It is true, she had "the school" and a certain rank in the village. But as Isaac's wife, with a home of her own, and Isaac to protect her, how greatly would her circumstances be improved! And what had she to bestow in return?—Clearly nothing. And again she acknowledged to herself "she had much the best of the bargain."

But somehow the knowledge of all this brought the blood into her cheeks, and Mary turned away —turned away to hide her happiness from Parson Hill!

"And so you do then absolutely intend to give yourself to this scapegrace, upon his promise not to go to the 'Packhorse!'—a *very* credulous young woman, upon my word!"

The parson's tone was now bitter as well as angry, and a slight sort of fear seemed suddenly to invade Mary's happy frame of mind.

"Why, you will not have been married one

month," resumed the parson, "no—not a week!—before he will resume his old habits, and treat you, in *his* drunken fits, as Peter Barker treats his wife Hannah!—And pray what do you think of that, Mistress Cope?"

Mary turned round with a face of horror! The good man was touched by this mute evidence of feeling. He forgot his anger in an instant, and only remembered he came to try to save her.

"Give him up, Mary," said he, in an altered tone; "give him up, he is not worthy of you. I will forget that you have had this foolish fancy; I will protect you from the village gossips—ay, from all the world, Mary; only you see you must give up this bad man."

"Indeed, sir, he is not bad," said Mary, as she stood now pale and trembling in the presence of Parson Hill. "He has not been lately, I should say; I do not mean to deny that he has been wrong many times, and so caused a great deal of anxiety and sorrow to his friends; but then you see, sir, if he gives up the 'Packhorse,' there is nothing else to complain of; and I know he will give it up—I *know* he will!" said she, for she spoke

according to her own convictions. But the parson shook his head wearily, and Mary continued:

"And I thought, sir, you would be so glad! Indeed, sir," added she, eagerly, "half my own pleasure was in thinking of your satisfaction and of the good Widow Simpson's happiness."

"Oh, Mary, Mary!" said the parson, as he passed his hand over his brow, "you know you are only talking nonsense—stupid nonsense!"

Mary could not longer restrain her tears; she felt she only spoke the truth, but she felt also that Parson Hill doubted her.

Her tears again softened the parson, in spite of his want of faith in her asseverations, and he said kindly,

"Give him up, Mary. I tell you I will forgive all this. You can rely upon me. You know I will do as I say. I will never reproach you, or allow any other, if you will only break off this very foolish engagement."

Mary did not reply.

"Do you hear me, Mary? I want you to promise me to give up this vagabond, Isaac Watson."

"What, break my promise, sir! I cannot do that!"

"Then you will have to resign the school—and——"

"Resign the school, sir!" said Mary, in much consternation. "Oh, no! no! I hope not, sir."

"But you must do one thing or the other. On one side you have Isaac Watson, his great wealth, and his absurd promise"—and the parson's voice had a sneering tone—"which he will break before you have been married a week, and you will be a wretched woman for life. On the other, you have the school"—here the parson paused as if to give due weight to his words—"my friendship and protection, the support and encouragement of all good people, and the chance of making an honourable marriage in the future! Now, Mary," continued the parson, as he arose to depart, "think the matter over, and remember no one shall ever dare to upbraid you with this temporary act of foolishness. I will protect you. God bless you, Mary!" said he kindly, as he extended his hand, "and help you to form a right resolution, and abide by it, or act up to it. Good morning."

And Parson Hill went away.

CHAPTER XV.

OF PARSON HILL'S OPINION OF MRS. HARCOURT.

AND in the evening of this same day Mrs. Hill and Mrs. Harcourt were strolling together in the grounds at the Vicarage. When they reached the entrance-gate, they stood watching the setting sun.

"He arose so magnificently this morning!" said Mrs. Harcourt. "I never saw the moor in such a flood of light, or the scenery to my mind so charming—and now the sun is setting behind that great bank of clouds!"

"But that need not make you sad, dear. I hear, by the tone of your voice, some chord has been struck that has for the time being arrested

the flow of your spirits. Of what are you thinking?"

"Of nothing worth mentioning—only his rising so gorgeously on this day and setting so darkly, seem to me like life—which opens amid flowers and song, and companionship and love, and closes in darkness and solitude, loneliness and the grave!"

And then, as a smile broke over her features, she added, in a brighter tone,

"Now I must laugh at my own sentimentality."

"But why do you harbour thoughts of 'loneliness'—you whose future looks so bright!" said Mrs. Hill.

"Surely you are not serious," said Mrs. Harcourt.

"Indeed I am. I have longed to congratulate you upon the—upon—I suppose, though it is scarcely etiquette to make one's congratulations before the engagement is announced?"

"Now what *can* you mean?" said Mrs. Harcourt, as she suddenly stood still and turned to face her friend.

"Has my brusquerie offended you?—pray excuse me," said Mrs. Hill, offering her hand.

I am not offended," said Mrs. Har-
placed her hand in that of her friend.
must ask you to explain yourself."

congratulate you most heartily on a forth-
coming most auspicious event, and I am ready at any minute to kneel and kiss the hand of—the Queen of Dartmoor!"

Mrs. Hill suited her action to her words, and was in the act of kissing her friend's hand, when Mr. Hill and Charlie came suddenly in sight.

The vicar stopped for a second or two, with a look of surprise, raised his hat, and then went on. Charlie turned to his wife, and said,

"I told you so—I told you so—'Queen of Dartmoor.'"

Mrs. Harcourt had turned away, and did not hear this, and Charlie followed the vicar.

"You are making extensive alterations here," said Charlie, coming upon the vicar in a particular part of his grounds, where many shrubs had been lifted, and where several men were at work.

"Ah, yes, Charlie, boy, it is a suggestion of Mrs.——"

But the vicar turned to give some directions to

the men, and did not complete the sentence.

Some little time elapsed before he again spoke to Charlie, and then he said:

"She has such perfect taste—and besides, I always did think this part of the shrubbery much too crowded.

"That yew is the most graceful tree of its kind I ever remember to have seen," said Charlie, as he stepped back to take a better view.

"The bole is laid open by removing these shrubs. You see the growth has been stopped on this side, and by great good luck the tree has grown marvellously elegant and graceful. By having been so crowded up, we might rather have expected deformity than beauty."

"Perhaps we did not expect either," said Charlie.

"I confess I had not noticed this tree for a long time. Sometimes I—I *do* neglect my grounds, and thus I feel the more grateful for this kind suggestion."

"Has she ordered it to be cut down?" said Charlie, with a mischievous smile.

The vicar stopped in his directions to his work-

men, and turned to Charlie with an air of surprise. After a little pause he finished giving his orders, and joined Charlie, who stood at some little distance from the spot, evidently taking in the points.

"The shrubs have certainly injured the tree," said Charlie.

"That is of no importance, happily," said the vicar.

"No importance? Why, I thought you valued that tree?"

"So I do. But I value it in its present state—in its present position; and I shall value it ten times more when I have finished my present undertaking."

The vicar took from his pocket a small field-glass, and taking Charlie's arm, and retracing his steps to the yew-tree, he placed the glass in Charlie's hand, and asked him to describe what he saw. Charlie looked for a second or two, and then exclaimed, with a start of surprise:

"What! Barstock?"

"Yes. And look to the right."

"Ah! there is Prince's Town, and the Dart-

moor Prisons, just nestling down like a large white bird."

Charlie returned the glass, and the vicar again took his arm, and they continued their walk in the shrubberies.

"We were lounging about that part of the grounds soon after she came," said the vicar, "and even at that time she pointed out the fact of the shrubs doing a serious injury to the tree. She has so quick an eye for nature."

"*She!*" thought Charlie; but he was wisely silent.

"And she also said the removal of the huge shrubs from the thicket opposite the yew would give a charming vista, and lay open Prince Town. And so it has proved. She is generally right."

"We have seen that view thousands of times from the field at the back of the shrubbery," said Charlie.

"True, Charlie, boy; but *we* never thought of opening that vista, and having the view from the bole of the tree! Women are so—oh! no, *not* all women; but she is remarkably quicksighted!"

so far-sighted! or perhaps

e.

vicar.

arson Hill and Charlie again
the lawns and shrubberies, enjoy-
gars in the open air. And in due
time they again came upon the yew-

"Now, Charlie, suppose we seat ourselves," said the vicar.

There were now four elegant chairs, made of galvanised iron wire, placed under the arch formed by the boughs of the yew-tree.

The setting sun lighted up the distant parts of the moor, and the panorama was one of great extent and great beauty. There was still a sufficiency of rarity in the atmosphere to see distinctly the nearer part of the view, but the lengthened shadows added greatly to the charm. Charlie silently enjoyed the scene, puffing away at his cigar.

The vicar silently enjoyed Charlie's satisfaction.

"She was right, you see," said he, at last, quite

unconscious that he had not mentioned any name.

"Was she?" said Charlie, with shameful imperturbability.

The vicar took his cigar from his mouth, and looked at Charlie for a second or two without speaking; then resumed his employment, as he said in a very gentle tone,

"I thought you liked her, Charlie boy."

"Did you?" said Charlie. "I cannot answer your 'thought' in a satisfactory manner, for I do not know the 'she' to whom you allude."

"Not know Mrs. Harcourt?" said the vicar.

"Ah—of course I know 'she,'" said Charlie, laughing, "but as you did not mention any name, how was I to single out the particular 'she' to whom you alluded?"

"Perhaps I was thinking of her," said Parson Hill, quietly; "I daresay I was—I often do—I admire her—indeed she is a very charming woman, don't you think so, Charlie?"

"I do," said Charlie.

"Ah, well," and now the parson seemed intent on being communicative, for he spoke with more energy than usual as he added, "she has an eye

for nature—a very fine eye for scenery—and she revels in our moorland beauties."

"This is of course the same 'she,'" thought Charlie, but he did not interrupt Parson Hill.

"When she discovered the state of the yew tree, that is, that the branches grew so gracefully—'almost like the train of a peacock'—those were her very words, Charlie!—and in my own memory I have called it the peacock tree ever since—it is such an—such an original idea—she is full of original ideas!"

"Very enjoyable," said Charlie.

"Very," said the vicar heartily; "there is a great charm in originality—and, as you say, Charlie, she is very original."

"*You* said that," thought Charlie, but he did not reply.

"Ah!—I was telling you—she early discovered the state of the tree—she was enthusiastic in her admiration of the elegance and grace of the drooping branches—more like the growth of a cedar than a yew—and then she descanted on the advantage of removing the shrubs. Those that were close to the tree were of no use, and

were doing a serious injury—those on the other side of the path only helped to block up a magnificent view. She was right."

The two gentlemen were silent for a minute or two; then the parson resumed—

"A wide expanse of moor, Charlie!"

"Yes, a wide expanse," said Charlie, with a smile, "and a goodly number of Tors."

"To be sure," said the vicar in a pleasant voice; "she is like me in her appreciation of this kind of scenery. I delight in the hoary Tors; in all weathers, in all seasons, at all hours of the day or night, there is a wondrous magnificence about them, that fills the mind not only with a sense of beauty, but with some degree of awe."

Charlie was scarcely prepared for so much enthusiasm on the part of Parson Hill. He arose, and, throwing away the end of his cigar, stepped back to take note of the yew-tree.

"You see, Charlie boy," said the vicar, joining him, "by placing chairs—under the arch made to our very hands—we have a comfortable arbour, and an exquisite view."

"So we have," said Charlie.

"All her own idea, I do assure you,' said the parson.

"Clever," said Charlie.

"Indeed, yes," said the parson, approvingly "You see she is a woman who thinks."

"And observes," said Charlie.

"*And* observes," said the vicar, in a tone of satisfaction. "Some women—I may say rather—but few women 'observe' to such a purpose; and how few 'think,' Charlie? Many talk; but that is a very different thing. Talk may be all very well, and I may say it *is* in her, for she talks well. But some women do talk such stuff—"

"Perhaps they do," said Charlie, carelessly.

"Perhaps!—nonsense, Charlie, we know it. I hear them—and so must you—I hear them, but I let them run on."

"Yes, run on with their 'stuff'—it would be a pity to stop them—we may infer they enjoy it."

"Of course they do; gabble, gabble, gabble.—She never does that—I think it such a comfort."

"A very great comfort,' said Charlie; "in point of fact, if you were to have a woman who

"He is going to see the pretty schoolmistress," said Mrs. Harcourt.

"Parson Hill thinks she will give him up," said Mrs. Hill.

"Will she?" said Mrs. Harcourt, in a defiant tone. "He will not make me agree with him."

"I fear he takes a wrong view of the case."

"They are sure, Isaac and she, to be constant and true," said Mrs. Harcourt, laughing, "because people make such a fuss about them. The having had their wooing so unceremoniously abridged is enough to anger them both against all the world, and give them wonderfully good opinions of each other; and, besides all this, he is a handsome specimen of a well-to-do villager, and she is the simplest-minded and at the same time the most intellectual-looking young woman of her class that I have seen for many a long year. Oh! trust me, and my foresight, they will make a match of it, and I for one say 'God's benison be on them!'"

"You forget he is a great smoker, and such a dreadful drunkard!"

"Curiously enough, in spite of all I have heard, I do not credit that!"

"You amuse me so," said Mrs. Hill, "you never believe anything against a favourite."

"I never saw the man till now, so he cannot well be a favourite; but his manner and appearance are marvellously in his favour. He looks one full in the face when he speaks, sign of a steadfast mind. If he makes a promise, he will keep it. Such is my opinion of Isaac Watson!"

"Ah, you always take the part of those who are in trouble. But I am afraid he is a thoroughly unstable man, and if not absolutely unprincipled, at least one whose well-known propensity causes much unhappiness to his friends. Even Charlie shakes his head when I venture to hope for the best!"

"Man is rarely charitable to his fellow man, but love is a great purifier; his evil courses may be amended by his love for a pure, innocent-hearted woman, and see—he has stopped at the School Cottage," said Mrs. Harcourt.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARY COPE'S VERSION TO ISAAC WATSON OF PARSON HILL'S CONVERSATION WITH HER.

AND now we will follow Isaac Watson, who walked on at a moderate pace, rather as if he were eschewing some great thought than going to see his sweetheart.

Isaac's mind was full of the future, and of what he hoped to make that future. In the morning, when the sun rose, he had been desponding, the memory of his past life came before him in vivid hues, and although he had been made joyous on the announcement of his engagement, both by the congratulations of friends and the presence of Mary Cope, his conscience did not

always sleep, and on this particular morning it had been particularly troublesome.

Isaac worked hard all day, and during his work he listened to the flow of his grandmother's happiness; so that it seemed as if the bodily exercise to which he himself was subjected, and the garrulity of the Widow Simpson combined, gradually put to flight his sombre thoughts, and as evening drew near his spirits rose, and his expectation of seeing Mary Cope brought the smile to his lip once more. As he had been very desponding, so now in this reaction he felt very glad. He pictured Mary's welcoming smile, her joyous laugh, her charming simplicity, and her pretty surprise when he should produce another present he had brought from London—even a duet for soprano and bass—no other than Jackson's—of Exeter—"Love in thine Eyes," which, with several others of a like kind, he had picked up at old music stalls in his many walks about town.

He slackened his pace and trod with a lighter step as he approached Mary's cottage; these were not demonstrations of Isaac's well-known shyness; he was no longer to be called "shy," but he was

very tender and gentle even in his thoughts of Mary, and he would not startle her by too hasty or too loud an approach if he could help it. As Mrs. Harcourt had said, "love is a great purifier," and it has a marvellous power in awakening dormant faculties. Isaac had always been unselfish and kind-hearted from nature and habit, now he was more—he was heroic; he would not advance his own joy one hair's breadth by a moment of uneasiness to Mary. He valued her composed and self-reliant manner, and he inwardly vowed that no act of his should ever disturb her serenity or embitter her peace. And Isaac repressed the joyous bounding of his heart and kept his steps in check, so that at length he knocked at Mary's door so gently, that, if she had not been watching for him, he must have knocked again ere he had been admitted.

Mary did not attempt to hide the joy she felt when she opened the door; and we are bound to add that the meeting was in all respects such as two lovers might reasonably expect and feel fully satisfied with—Isaac, that he had enjoyed his privilege; and Mary, that, in spite of her coyness, she was nothing loth. But such meetings do

not absorb any great length of time, and the two were soon seated side by side, Mary's hand still retained by Isaac.

"I cannot tell you how glad I am you are come," said Mary, as she raised her eyes to Isaac, who fondly pressed her hand, but did not interrupt her speech.

In the first place, he liked to look at Mary and listen to her sweet voice; and in the second, he had quite enough to do to keep his throbbing heart in order, that seemed by the bounds it made at its own gladness as if it would "cry aloud" in its happiness, for he knew by instinct it would "tremble on his tongue," and so, as I have said, he simply pressed her hand, and remained silent.

"I wanted you so much, Isaac," and now Mary's tones became a little sad, "for Parson Hill has spoken to me."

Isaac was aroused from his quiet dream in an instant; he clutched the hand he held firmly, and with the other round her waist drew her nearer to him as he anxiously said,

"The parson has spoken to you!—he is a good and a kind man, Mary."

"Yes," said Mary, turning away her head, "he was kind this morning—"

Isaac did not like the appearance of things. He felt there must be something unpleasant to come, or Mary would not hesitate; but even this suspense, for the moment, seemed better than some dreadful reality, and Isaac made no effort to encourage Mary's communication.

"I don't quite know how to tell you all that he said, Isaac, and yet I suppose I ought."

"You know best, Mary," said he, in a low voice; "it concerns me, I suppose?"

"Yes—that is, it concerns *us*," said Mary, blushing.

"He says he will not let you have me?—is that it?" said Isaac, in a voice that he intended to repress into tones of gentleness, but which strangely blurted out the words with a kind of spasmodic force.

"Oh, no!" said Mary, looking up brightly, and now speaking joyously, "indeed he said no such thing," for she felt that even Parson Hill had no power to prevent her marrying whom she pleased.

With a loud sigh of relief, Isaac once more

pressed the little hand that he had never relinquished, and tightened his grasp on Mary as he said, in loud cheery tones,

"Thank God!—thank God! my dear Mary, I can bear anything else with comparative patience."

Mary looked with astonishment on Isaac's emotion, and then, as she met his eye, suddenly felt a strange bashfulness creep over her, which for the moment paralyzed her thoughts and the expression of them.

"I can bear anything else, Mary—anything but the loss of you," said he, fondly; "and perhaps I can advise you—can I?"

"Perhaps you can," said Mary, as soon as she found her tongue; "and so I had better try to tell you all that was said."

Mary seemed to have overcome that little bit of sadness that evidently came uncalled for at the recollection of Parson Hill. There was a something very satisfactory in Isaac's presence, and Mary now spoke in a confiding and straightforward manner, that completely put Isaac at his ease; and so, in this comfortable mood on both sides, Mary began her tale.

"I told the parson you had promised never to go to the 'Packhorse,'" said she, proudly.

Isaac only bowed his head and smiled.

"You see, he asked if it was true—I mean about you and me," said Mary, blushing.

Isaac pressed her hand, but did not speak.

"But he thinks you will not keep your word."

"What!—about that 'Packhorse?'" said Isaac, with scorn.

"Yes."

Mary did not like to proceed with her story; and Isaac remained silent. For the space of half a minute there was a little air of dissatisfaction visible on both faces. At length Mary resumed,

"I told him you *would* keep your promise—I knew you would."

No one who had seen Mary then, or heard the tone of her voice, could have doubted her perfect belief in her asseveration; though, if she had been asked upon what she rested it, it would have been found simply on Isaac's word.

"Did that content the parson?" asked Isaac, despondingly.

"No," said Mary, shaking her head; "he said

pressed the little hand t'wn," and she raised her quished, and tightened ad what Isaac thought of said, in loud cheery :

"Thank God! d not explain what this will of can bear anytl do with the parson's want of faith,

Mary loo said,

tion, and " and then, as Mary hesitated, he strang hat makes the parson think I will not mor word?—why should I promise voluntarily o ish to break my promise?"

Why, he says you only do it 'to gain your own ds,'" said Mary, innocently.

But innocently though she spoke, she was greatly surprised at the effect of her words. Isaac's whole face became a burning red up to the very roots of his hair.

"The dastardly liar!" said he, impetuously; and he dropped the little hand he had so long retained, and clenched his fist.

"Isaac!" said Mary, staring at him with wide open eyes.

"Oh! I beg your pardon, my dear, but I could not bear to hear such things said to you," said Isaac, apologetically.

hey were not pleasant; and I told him it
true," said Mary, so simply and guile-
y as to turn away Isaac's anger, and cause
im to laugh a hearty laugh. Then he seized hold of Mary, and indemnified himself for the parson's speech by a slight caress, again keeping one arm round her waist, and with the other retaining her hand. "There, now you are pleased again. I am glad of that, because, though I tried hard to convince the parson you had nothing to gain, he did not believe me."

"Did not he?" said Isaac, again laughing, and pressing Mary tightly to him; for now it was his turn to feel he had *everything* to gain.

"I do not much wonder at the parson's unbelief," thought he, as he inwardly chuckled over the mightiness of his prize; and if his satisfaction was visible in his face, he took care not to commit himself by a single word.

"Why, I told him I was quite ashamed, when I thought about things, which of course I did not at first, for then I was only thinking of you," said she, blushing; "but when I did begin to think, I knew I had only my little bit of furniture, which

of course is not worth any man trying to gain," and now Mary laughed at the ridiculousness of the supposition.

"Did he say anything more?" said Isaac.

"He said I was going to have you for your wealth and position—he did, Isaac. But though I told him he was wrong, I saw he did not believe me. But, Isaac, I hope you do?—for I never even thought about anything you had, until the parson said you wanted me for what you could get, and that set me off thinking."

"To be sure, and very naturally," said Isaac, with a smile. "And we will not care much for the parson's unbelief, while we can so truly rely on each other."

"But I wish he would believe us," said Mary.

"So do I," said Isaac. "And we must contrive to convince him that we both say what we mean, and that we both mean well."

Mary's face became so beaming and joyous at this turn in the conversation, that Isaac forgot to be angry with the vicar, and they remained for a short time silent.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH ISAAC WATSON TAKES HIMSELF OFF, AND LEAVES MARY COPE TO DO AS SHE PLEASES.

"AND so the vicar thinks I want to get your nice furniture, does he?" said Isaac looking round contentedly. "Why, Mary, there is no denying that I always did admire it very much; but then I admire you more!"

"Oh! and that is just what Parson Hill said at last."

"That I admire you, and value you much more than I either admire or value your furniture! Very true, Mary, so I do. I hope *that* pleased him?"

"No. He seemed more angry than ever. I cannot tell why," said Mary, artlessly, replying to

Isaac's look of inquiry, and then resuming: "But he said I seemed to think I had the best of the bargain; and indeed I never thought about it."

"Of course not," said Isaac, kindly.

"And you—why, if I had nothing in the world, not even my furniture, *you* would promise—promise me anything just to gain your own ends."

Isaac sprang from the sofa as he clenched his fists, and almost shouted,

"The dastardly parson! It is a lie! I say it is a lie!"

Mary's astonishment exhibited itself by suddenly rising and clasping her hands entreatingly together.

"Isaac!—Isaac!" said she, and yet she did not venture to go near him. "Isaac, what makes you so angry?"

Isaac neither saw nor heard her; he paced up and down the small apartment with hasty strides, heaping epithets of reproach on Parson Hill.

This continued for a minute or two. At first it was quite incomprehensible to Mary, and as she stood there silent and unnoticed, she could not restrain a loud outburst of emotion.

At this moment she arrested Isaac's attention, and he was at once recalled to himself. With all his tender gentleness returned, he took her by the arm, weeping as she was, for she did not remove her kerchief from her face, and once more placed her by his side on the sofa.

"Mary, dear Mary, I am ashamed of myself," said Isaac.

And we may say of him, if he was impulsive and unrestrained under anger, he was always ready to express his contrition, for this was the second time in this short conversation that he had used the same words.

Mary heard, but did not comprehend him, and, after a short silence, Isaac added,

"But now, Mary dear, did the parson say anything more?"

Mary had suffered so much by repeating the conversation between Parson Hill and herself, that she felt a very justifiable reluctance to say more at this time. But upon Isaac making it clear to her it had now become a necessity that he should be told all, Mary finished her communications by acknowledging that, though Parson Hill had not

taken the matter in his own hands, or hinted that he would not permit her to marry Isaac, he had advised her to "give him up." He had placed before her in a strong light the advantage of retaining himself for a friend, the school-mistressship of Lawsleigh, her present position in the village, and—Mary did not say a superior marriage, as Mr. Hill had said—but an honourable future; while, on the other hand, he had painted as strongly that she had only Isaac's word for the change he averred had taken place; and that the probabilities were more in favour of his return to his former habits after marriage than otherwise; for that the habit of inebriety was rarely, if ever, conquered!

She did not even fail to allow to Isaac that when she thought of his near neighbour, Peter, and his treatment of his poor wife, her courage sometimes failed her. She could not, at all times, keep off feelings of despondency; and though, with charming simplicity, she said, almost in the same breath, "that she never *could* believe Isaac would do such things," nevertheless, it was clear to

him that the parson had jarred the strings of Mary's happy reliance on his future good conduct, and awakened, at times, doubts in her mind as to the propriety of placing herself in his power.

We ought to have said before this that, during the pauses of the conversation, Isaac's conscience not unfrequently recalled to view his past ill-spent life, and strongly placed it in juxtaposition with the well-known purity and quietness of Mary's. He felt that, though he would be everything to her that the heart of woman could desire, she might not unreasonably have strong doubts of his future career, and not only doubt herself, but allow those doubts to become certainties by the support they had in the opinions of others.

These thoughts, recurring as they did at every trip and turn of the conversation, as Mary's simplicity and gentleness unfolded themselves to him, at length gained so much strength, as to make him feel almost ashamed of taking advantage of his present position with her. He had felt all along that, if Parson Hill had advised Mary to make him—Isaac—prove that he was reclaimed before he

married her, he would cheerfully have abided by the parson's decision, and manfully have borne—with outward patience, at least—the check that would thus have been placed on his own wishes. If Parson Hill would take him by the hand, and give him a trial, Isaac felt equal to the emergency. But if, on the contrary, Parson Hill should exert his power to prevent Mary exercising her own free will, then he felt that bitter and angry thoughts or deeds would arouse him to defend himself, and rescue her from the parson's control.

Isaac would rise against oppression, but he gave way when he met with freedom of action, generosity of spirit, and kindness of heart. And so, when he at length found that, though Parson Hill had strongly advised Mary "to give him up," he had yet left her free to act as she pleased, and had even allowed her time to think over the circumstances of the case, so as to be enabled to decide equally free from a too strongly-exerted power on the part of the parson, or a too easy-yielding to the dictates of her own heart, Isaac's better nature came into play. He felt consoled that so good a man as Mr.

Hill had thought it right that Mary should judge for herself in a matter that would be to her of vital importance for the rest of her life.

And now it was that Isaac felt the power of his position at this moment with Mary Cope. He looked at her, and instinctively, as it were, felt that she would credit all he said, and that he could prevail upon her to have him in spite of Parson Hill's advice, or the example of Peter Barker's conduct to Hannah. But, as we have said before, Isaac respected and esteemed Mary Cope as much as he loved her, and he magnanimously said to himself:

"As the parson has done, so will I do. Mary shall have time to think over her position. I will never have it on my conscience that I have persuaded her to have me, and thereby caused her to lose, as I now very clearly see she must, the post of schoolmistress, and the notice and protection of Parson Hill."

And having thus, by slow degrees, eventually arrived at this decision, he turned to Mary and said:

"The parson is right, Mary."

Mary only looked at Isaac, for she had no clue to his thoughts.

"The parson is right, you see," said Isaac, now manfully preparing for victory over himself. "You see he has left you free to think over your position—to choose, as it were, for the rest of your life the one or the other. It is clear, if you keep your word to me, you will lose both the school and the parson. And so, Mary, it is right you should have time to think, so as—so as to choose wisely, or—or, at least, by acting for yourself give no occasion for blame to anyone else in the matter."

"It would indeed be very hard to give up the school, Isaac," said Mary, for she did not understand all he meant to convey. "But do you think the parson would really take it away from me? Why, there is no one here who could attend to it! And he has always been so kind, I cannot quite feel that he would never speak to me, or come to see me. And, besides, Isaac, when you keep your promise so well, and when he sees it!"

"That is in the future," said Isaac, solemnly, "and you have to do with the present."

"Yes, it is in the future, of course; but you

said, when we began to talk, that perhaps you could advise me—do so now, Isaac—tell me, what shall I do?"

There was such simplicity in Mary's manner, and such perfect openness in the expression of her countenance, Isaac saw at once she did not comprehend her choice lay between the school and himself. She seemed rather to infer from Parson Hill's well-known kindness, as well as from the difficulty there would be in finding another mistress, that she might marry Isaac and still retain the school. And so she did not foresee that Isaac was the last person to whom she should apply in such an emergency. The strong love he had for her, and her utter absence of suspicion at the power she thus placed in his hands, made him ready to advise her on the instant to accept him, and set the world at defiance.

But Isaac would not have been the generous-hearted man we have attempted to portray if he had given way to the unworthy thought. Once more he rose to meet the occasion, and said,

"This is just the only thing that I cannot advise about." Isaac paused, and Mary looked

serious. "You see, I am pointed out to you as a bad man, and——"

"Oh! Isaac," said Mary, interrupting him. "Why, I should never believe that you were bad, even if you told me so yourself!"

Isaac was gradually acquiring some little knowledge of the devotion and self-sacrifice of women when they love. He would not have been a lover if he had not rejoiced in the faith Mary had in his promises, evinced by that impulsive outburst; but he knew he must not take advantage of it.

"No, Mary. It is a great satisfaction and happiness to me to know at least that you *do* believe me."

Isaac's emotion made him pause, the better to hide it; and Mary said wonderingly,

"Of course I believe you."

"But you should remember, for your own sake, that sometimes people do not keep their promises, though——"

"And you, Isaac, to say such a thing!" said Mary, starting up in dismay; "and *you* would not keep your promise!"

"I did not say that," said Isaac, in a low voice;

but he made no effort to replace Mary by his side. "It is due to myself to say I mean to keep my word, so help me God!" said Isaac, solemnly. "But, Mary, the parson means you to understand that perhaps I shall not; and you ought to take time to think over what he has said to you—he is a good man, Mary, and means well; and—and then, Mary," said Isaac, his courage rising with his desire to be just with Mary, and to allow her time to be just to herself, "you ought to think how miserable and wretched you would be; for marriage is 'for better, for worse,' and in some cases it turns out all worse and no better—miserable, I mean, if I did not keep my word."

Mary was silent, from the intensity of her astonishment and dismay.

"And so," continued Isaac, as he rose to go, "the parson is right; you ought to think well over the matter, and choose between the two."

After a little pause, he added,

"I feel, Mary, very like one whose life is blighted by his own actions; and as I cannot in conscience say a good word for myself, except that I *mean* to keep my word, why, you see, Mary, you will have

to decide for yourself whether you will accept the bad man and his promise to amend, or whether you will hold by the school and the parson."

Poor Isaac!—he spoke bitterly—he had not foreseen he should be so relentless to himself, or that the circumstances would require it. Mary could not understand him. He extended his hand as he uttered a very gentle

"Good-bye, Mary."

But she was weeping, and trying to hide her emotion by covering her face with her hands.

Isaac turned to go, and once more said,

"Good-bye, Mary."

He stood a second or two stroking his cap round and round; but Mary did not speak. And when at length she had courage to look at him, he was lifting the latch of the door, and leaving her thus alone and unsupported to decide on the most important event of her life.

Isaac's courage almost forsook him as he witnessed her mute despair. He knew she had but two friends in the whole world, and they had both turned aside in this her great extremity, and left her to decide for herself.

Parson Hill had thought it right that Mary should judge for herself. Isaac Watson thought the same. When he stepped forth and closed the door behind him, he knew he had done right. And though he felt sad-hearted and unhappy, he also felt a comfort in looking back upon his own magnanimity.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHICH TREATS OF THE DEEDS OF PETER BARKER.

IT was just at this time that the village of Lawsleigh was awakened from its customary quiet, and steady flowing on in the even tenor of its way, by an event that struck horror into the simple minds of its inhabitants.

Peter Barker had returned from one of his visits to the "Packhorse" in his habitual state of intoxication, and, as we may say, to the credit of the moor people generally, they were gradually inclining themselves to better things than wasting their time by smoking and drinking at the "Packhorse," so Peter Barker's conduct, as it was always more brutal under excitement than that of others

themselves in a like way, was also
lookers-on.
asion the man had made himself
the women as he passed their cottages
ying disagreeable epithets to each, as they
nded to the tiny round of their accustomed
duties inside and out of their homes.

One woman was cleaning her windows, and throwing water upon the panes. Peter made an unbecoming remark, and the woman dashed a large basin of water in his face. Other instances, as he continued to walk through the village, occurred of women resenting in a fierce way some dastardly or disgusting speech made by him as he passed. And each time that Peter received the reward of his own behaviour, he grew more and more angry, and more and more intent upon wreaking his vengeance on some one.

He was pursued to his own door by several women, each armed with something to protect herself or her friends from his *grossièreté*, and all talking loudly. The Widow Simpson was startled by the noise, and one of the women went to tell her of Peter's unseemly coarseness as he passed their

doors. When Peter at length entered his home, the women pushed against his door, and would not let him close it. They knew instinctively that Hannah would be his victim, and they courageously followed him home with a view to protect her from his fury. Because, though Peter was the aggressor, it was plain that they had greatly augmented his naturally vile temper by their reprisals; and they knew also, from well-known experience, that until he had slept off his inebriety, and was thus partially restored to a right mind, he would not fail of having his revenge upon any unprotected person; but more than all others, this vindictive temper would expend itself on his wife.

"Hannah, poor thing, her be not there," said the Widow Simpson.

The women were glad to hear she was absent, and inquired if the old woman knew where she was to be found, because these kind-hearted creatures would take care to let her know in what state her husband was, and thus prevent any collision between them, or brutal treatment of Hannah by Peter, if possible.

"She be to the Vickridge," said the widow. "There be company, and Hannah have a-give she's help."

"Then, widdy, her won't be back afore the night?"

"No, no; Hannah be a deft-handed creature, and maybe her won't come back afore the ten or the eleven o'clock."

"Then us will leave Peter to hisself, and let him pull down the cottage in his surliness."

And after a little more talk, and a certainty that Peter had sought some place of rest, which they, poor things, concluded was his bed, the women returned to their own homes.

This took place on the very night Isaac had his interview with Mary Cope. The Widow Simpson told him on his return home all she knew; and Isaac's contemplation of his own position was none the brighter for the knowledge of Peter's state. He foresaw that, unless Mary and he were actually married, every occurrence of this sort would lessen his chance of so desirable an event ever taking place. He felt very keenly that, as he had to a certain extent been Peter's

companion in many a debauch at the "Pack-horse," so now Peter's deeds in all their vileness would also to a certain extent cast a shadow over himself. He recalled the old proverb, "You cannot touch pitch without defiling your fingers," and with a heavy sigh he acknowledged that the past years of his life had been deeply sullied by fits of intemperance, that had left a stain upon his name and character hard to remove, and that had also made indelible impressions on the minds of lookers-on, which no after-conduct could erase.

"I must bear it," said he to himself, as he tried to hide these upbraiding thoughts from the widow, and to appear cheerful in her presence. He lighted his pipe, and took his accustomed corner in the cottage; while the widow went to and fro as she attended to her home duties, and with the loquaciousness of age, congratulated herself and Isaac on his engagement with Mary Cope.

And so passed the evening at the Widow Simpson's cottage; while poor Mary Cope, almost beside herself at the strange and unexpected position in which she found herself so suddenly placed, at length retired to rest, more restless than ever.

She hoped she should forget her troubles in sleep, but no such thing happened. Mary passed a wakeful night, tossing from this side to that, without making up her mind to anything.

"I cannot think what Isaac could mean," she repeated to herself, over and over again. "How am I to judge more than I have done?—I thought Isaac loved me—I did so believe all he said. And I thought he meant what he said about never going to that 'Packhorse' again; and now he actually tells me people sometimes break their promises; as if I ever thought of such a thing as that *he* would break his promise. Oh! Isaac, Isaac! And he even said again he meant to keep his promise. Then why does he leave me to choose?—and why cannot he advise me?—next to Parson Hill himself, I am sure I should take Isaac's advice."

And then Mary recollected the substance of Parson Hill's advice, and she felt she did not wish to follow that. And then she turned again to Isaac in her thoughts, and said,

"If Isaac had advised me to have him, why, of course I should, because I should feel so sure he

would tell me for the best; and then—why, then, all my trouble would be over, and I should be so happy, for I know what it is to be happy with Isaac Watson by my side!"

Poor Mary! She had yet to learn what was meant by trouble, for her life had been comparatively free from such a burden.

But the morning came at last. The little birds began their "tweet, tweet," the sun came slowly up from his rest, sounds of a stirring world broke upon the air, succeeded by the loud rumble of waggons rolling along, and the hoarse voices of the drivers rising above the sound.

"But," said Mary Cope, as she at length attempted to rise, "I did not hear Peter's voice—it is the most harsh and disagreeable of them all," and she went and opened the casement, and, looking out, continued her remarks, "He is not there; John Pike, and Abraham, and Joe Gadge I can see, but no Peter Barker. Now, that is odd; for though the man is so bad, and does drink so much cider, I never knew the waggons go to the quarries without him." And Mary began to make her morning toilette.

At the school Mary expected to meet Parson Hill. She went in fear and trembling. And Parson Hill had intended to see Mary, but another proverb now illustrates the position of Mary Cope and the vicar. "L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose." And the parson did not go to the school. Mary feared to meet Parson Hill's eye, or to listen to a word he had to say; but she knew she must go through such an ordeal, and yet she had not in her own mind determined how to answer the queries she knew she might expect from him.

Mary's mind was so full of her own trouble she did not observe how few of the village children made their appearance that morning.

She went on mechanically with her round of duties, just attending to the present moment with her eyes and fingers from habit, and allowing her mind to absent itself in Isaac Watson's favour; still marvelling at the strange turn events had taken in their interview the night previously, and scarcely daring to look into the future for a satisfactory end to all these changes.

And the morning was more than half over, and

Mary continued most disconsolately to perform her duties, until her attention was arrested by the sound of many voices approaching the school. In a second or two the door was opened, and there seemed to Mary to be a very uproarious Babel of voices, one of which said,

"Her was to the Vickridge till eleven. And, Mistress Cope, here you be a-sitting so awful still, as it sim to I, and so white like"—as the paleness of Mary's face attracted her attention—"just the same, to my mind, as if nobody wasna a-killed—that be *murdered*, I means!"

"Murdered!" said Mary, shrinking back with a face of horror. "Murdered, did you say? Who is murdered?"

By this time the schoolroom—usually so sacred a place from the intrusion of village gossips—was filled with Mary's absent scholars and their mothers, women of all ages; and one of whom, standing near to Mary, replied in harsh, unfeminine tones—

"Why, poor Hannah Barker. Peter has a-knocked she's brains out! Her be found laying with she's head again the bed postesses!—and

pools and pools of blood! My! I say that comes of having a drunken husband! My!"

And the woman stared at Mary, and came so close to her, while she flourished her arms about in her excitement, that Mary had no difficulty in recognising the virago face of Jane Sands, neither did this woman's presence tend to soften the news she brought.

And now Mary knew why she had not seen Parson Hill; for amidst the confused hubbub that followed, and the disturbance of all order in the school, Mary ascertained that, as Peter did not make his appearance to join the waggoners going off to the quarry, one went to his cottage, as he had often done, for the purpose of arousing him. The man had no difficulty in entering, for the door was unfastened, and even the window-shutter not closed; and after calling many times without getting a response, he went upstairs, where, to his horror and amazement, he saw the lifeless corpse of Hannah Barker extended on the floor.

The poor woman, from the appearance of her attire, seemed to have met her fate immediately on her return home. She had not attempted to dis-

robe, more than to take off her bonnet and shawl, which lay on a table near.

In the bed lay Peter, with his face turned to the wall, as if to avoid the sight of the ghastly object so near to him ; his heavy carter's whip was by his side. The man called to him, but he spoke not, though he did not attempt to hide that he was awake. When questioned as to who had committed so awful a crime, he invariably replied he did not know.

He did not attempt to escape. When the proper authorities were at length aroused to a sense of the duties they were called upon to fulfil, and he was told he must submit himself to the power of the law, he submitted at once, only protesting his innocence. When the strange proximity of the whip was pointed out to him, and the clotted blood and locks of hair on the butt end shewn to him, he said he knew nothing about it.

The women who had followed him to his home reminded him of his surliness and *grossièreté* to them, but he denied even this. And if, therefore, his own word went for anything, there could be no

doubt but that Peter was innocent of all the evil of which he was accused.

These are some few of the things that are so appalling in the life of a drunkard. During his inebriety he is to a certain extent unconscious of his words and actions. A drunkard walks through the world, for the time being, indifferent to his own immorality and profaneness. He knows he has been drunk by the presence of certain racking headaches, and other uncomfortable sensations. This is all he knows. He even has the temerity to think himself hardly used when he is told he did this and that, and, in all probability, denies the fact.

And, as a rule, the man is not molested; people know he has been drunk, that he has shocked the moral and orderly class of society by his language and appearance; but they know also that during his state of inebriety he has not been accountable for his words and actions, and they leave him alone, as one too bad to mend.

But when, as in Peter's case, some great crime has been committed, and the law is compelled to step in and take its course, then the minds of

lookers-on are for the time being awakened to the dreadful evils of drunkenness, and the consequent sins. Then they see this particular vice in all its naked enormity. For the time being they think it the worst of evils, and for a certain period they try to arrest its course. They are severe with offenders; they administer punishment, as far as the law allows; and, in their horror at the enormity of the crime it has produced, see no chastisement sufficiently severe, and allow of no toleration to one who is known to be a drunkard.

And thus Isaac Watson had not overrated the consequences to himself of Peter's drunkenness. Before he was made aware that any crime had been the result of this state of inebriety, he had convinced himself that, let Mary's decision be as it might, the judgment of all would be against him. Few, he knew, would give him credit for a desire to reform; fewer still would approve of his marriage with Mary Cope.

Parson Hill had already shown, by his advice to Mary, what he thought of Isaac's promises; and though Isaac, in his heart, acknowledged the justice of the parson's opinion—for had he not

often promised to himself to reform, and had he not always broken his promise?—yet he felt both angry and ashamed of the fact.

And then, again, Isaac had always been on such good terms with the parson; must that, too, cease?—must he lose everything? He felt that even the village of Lawsleigh, that he loved so well, would be dreary enough to him without a kind word from the parson. How could he go to the belfry, if he were not friendly with the parson? How could he lead the choir without the parson's approving look? How lead the game at fives, played against the church tower, in sight of the vicar as he strolled on his own lawn, and who, accustomed now and then to join the players, and throw a ball with the best, would now turn his back and avoid them, because Isaac was there? How win a cricket match without the parson on his side to bowl?—for his bowling was worth that of three men.

These things seemed heavy enough to Isaac to bear, and he, like Mary, lay moodily awake, and wondering when the sun would rise again, and light up the world.

But as the night waned, and the morning dawned, Isaac fell into a doze, from which he was rudely aroused by an unusual clamour in the cottage below, as of many voices all talking together.

"What can be the matter?" said he, as he sprang out of bed. In a short time he was able to leave his room, and on descending and entering his shed, the concourse of people assembled, and the noise and bustle of the crowd, told that some very unusual event had occurred.

When Isaac learned the truth—that Peter Barker had actually committed murder in his fit of drunkenness—he felt, in addition to the horror with which such a crime inspired him, that his own fate was sealed.

He felt that now Mary Cope was lost to him for ever! Peter's sin somehow seemed to shadow very darkly over him. He shuddered as he remembered it was only by a mere accident—and even then he injured another person, and one now very dear to him—that he, too, had not committed a like crime; and though at the period to which Isaac alluded he knew he had been sober, yet to commit murder, whether in a fit of passion or

during a fit of intoxication, would still leave the crime the same. In his despondency, he even fancied he saw the neighbours pointing at him, and prognosticating that "sorrows never come single;" and that, as one murder had been committed, another might soon follow; for what was Isaac Watson but a drunkard?

"Conscience," we are told, "makes cowards of us all." But this is only true of the guilty. Isaac's conscience, at this period of his life, did not leave him many happy moments. And though he knew and confessed himself to be guilty in the matter of too much cider, he silently registered a vow that he would never lower himself again through the effects of any stimulating drink. Conscience, in this instance, made Isaac brave; brave to bear the jeers of his boon companions; brave to meet the eye of the parson, until he had, by his good conduct, won him back for a friend; brave, even to lose Mary Cope, for a time, until he could convince her of his reformation.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHY PARSON HILL'S CARRIAGR WAS NOT OVERTURNED.

AS will readily be understood, the whole village of Lawsleigh was thrown into great consternation by the sad event of Hannah's death. The unfortunate man, her husband, was taken before Parson Hill, who was the nearest magistrate, and who, to use his own words, never felt the duties of office so great a burden.

On one side here was a man past the prime of life, known to have lived in debauchery and low habits, known to have been merciless to his wife, and habitually quarrelsome even with his boon companions, placed at the stern bar of justice, to render an account of his deeds; a man whom

Parson Hill had known for the better half of his life, whom he had often tried to conciliate with kind words, and to soften and humanise by little unexpected kindnesses; a man, reckless, it is true, and dissipated, but yet a man with a soul to save—a man in all respects in the eyes of his Maker, equal with all others, or rather standing an equal chance with all others for the proffered mercies of the Saviour; and as such, the good parson's efforts, as a clergyman, to save him from the consequences of his wickedness, had been many and great.

But, on the other side, as a magistrate, seated in judgment over the events narrated to him, he could but act by the laws of the land he had sworn to administer; and much as the clashing duties of the priest and the judge jarred against each other, he knew that, for the time being, the latter must be paramount. He therefore committed Peter for trial at the next assizes on a charge of manslaughter!

None were surprised when they heard, almost immediately after Peter was sent away, that Parson Hill was suffering from severe headaches,

and that he had other symptoms of indisposition. Mr. Gray intreated him to try change of air. Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hill begged him to go with them to Paul Tavey. And at length the whole party at the Vicarage—for Mrs. Harcourt went also—took their departure. And once again the parish was left entirely in the hands of Mr. Gray.

In a few instances a change for the better took place in some of the most disreputable of the inhabitants of Lawsleigh after the committal of Peter. Parson Hill, from the bench, had spoken in strong terms of the demoralizing brawls at the "Packhorse," and had said that for the next offence the Widow Mason should lose her license. He added, also, that it was anything but a respectable house, and he greatly regretted that it stood within the boundaries of the parish of Lawsleigh.

The Widow Mason, therefore, took this as a hint to keep good hours, and only allow her house to be used by weary travellers passing to and fro, or, if by the inhabitants of Lawsleigh, in great moderation. She made her appearance at church with less absolute finery about her person, and, above all other things, she kept her slanderous

tongue quiet. She did more than this—she made speeches to Mr. Gray, whom she waylaid in his walks about the parish, and so mourned over the "harshness" of the words used by Parson Hill against her at the time of the committal of Peter, and so set forth her own innocence in glowing colours, as to awaken an interest for herself and her sorrows—in the form of a hope that she would amend—in the mind of that excellent gentleman.

Mary Cope continued her daily attendance at the school without her customary attention. Mary had never spoken to Isaac since that memorable night when he had so unexpectedly left her a prey to her own position; mistress and arbitratrix of it. Isaac's magnanimity had never been understood by Mary. She felt as if he had deserted her; and if events had so turned out that Parson Hill had remained at home, and had therefore followed up his intention of asking Mary for her decision for or against Isaac, undoubtedly, in her present desponding mood—as she fancied, left to stand alone by him who ought to have been her most powerful support—she would have gone over to the parson,

and left Isaac to reap bitter fruit from his great self-denial. And in that case, as all true lovers will see, she would have broken her own heart, as a proper punishment for her great temerity!

But Parson Hill had left his home. Fortunately also for Mary's present peace of mind, Mr. Gray had determined not to interfere in the matter between Isaac and her. He thought Mary too certainly guilty of deceitful conduct in London, to come out free from blot or speck if that conduct were rigidly examined into by Parson Hill, as Mr. Gray had no doubt it would be before Mary gained his consent for her marriage.

In the present state of Lawsleigh, with all the horror of Hannah's recent death and funeral, and Peter's committal to prison, Mr. Gray did not expect to find the parish otherwise than quiet and orderly; and as for love-making between Mary and Isaac, they might be as foolish as they pleased on that score, for one thing was certain, they could not marry without his assistance.

And so Mr. Gray "rested on his oars." He rested on his oars, and yet he was always brave in what he conceived to be his duty.

Most young men require experience, so did Mr. Gray. And if he was a little too confident in his own opinion, and a little too eager to alter the existing state of things, it was in the former case a want of experience; in the latter, a conviction that he was rectifying abuses. Such a man, while "resting on his oars," may chance to regret even that short cessation from labour.

Parson Hill read Mr. Gray right; and with his usual charity made allowance in his own mind, for what to some appeared eccentricities, and to others sheer ignorance. The latter was much oftener the case than the former. For the moor was a place peculiar in itself, and only those educated for such a position could be charged with the moral obligation of understanding it, and the duty of acting upon that knowledge.

"I have been young and inexperienced myself," said Parson Hill; "I know that *now—then* I was the most egregious ass that ever brayed! It is true I thought myself a very Solon!—I made a mistake, as many better people have done in their day. If Gray's ideas of himself run the same course, shall I blame him? Let him alone—let

him alone, say I, he will mend with years. He desires with all his heart and soul to do right—to help me—to better the parish, or the people in it—to introduce improvements—new blood, as it is called in these days," commented the parson, elevating his eyebrows; "and to benefit the moor generally. He is self-denying, hard-working, zealous, charitable, and kind-hearted—I say, God speed him!"

And so, as we have said, Mr. Gray rested on his oars, and did not interfere with Mary; and though she, poor thing, was lonely and unhappy, she did not complain. Indeed, she had no companion—since the departure of Susan Picard—and contented herself with her daily routine of duties, and a quiet walk when she could get it on the open moor, away from the village and its inhabitants.

But Sunday came, and Mary, like others well brought up, went to church. Parson Hill came from Paul Tavey to assist Mr. Gray in the duties of the day. And now Mary felt her fate was sealed; undoubtedly the parson would see her between the services, and, as she called it, "bring her to book."

Parson Hill intoned the service, as usual, and the choir sang; but it was remarked, Mary Cope's voice was very uncertain in power, and sad in tone, and Isaac Watson's spasmodic and tremulous.

Mr. Gray preached; and he took the opportunity thus presented to him, to read the congregation a homily on their quarrels and bickerings; on their sins and follies; on their inattention at church; on their love of pleasure; on their ignorance; on their ingratitude to their superiors; on their self-conceit; and wound up his discourse by asserting that the evils he had enumerated were each and all as bad as the sin of drunkenness, which had been the cause of the greatest crime known in the world, even murder, for which "Cain became a wanderer on the face of the earth!" And if they persisted in their bad courses, and disregarded his warning, how did they know that they might not all become murderers?

And the congregation separated, silent and awe-stricken! humbled in manner and sad at heart. To do them but justice, they were astonished at the number and magnitude of their own crimes! They were alarmed at their position; but in

their simplicity they did not know how they had suddenly become so wicked, or what to do to amend!

Mary Cope sat in her cottage between the services, awaiting in fear and trembling the visit of Parson Hill. But the parson—who lunched with Mr. Gray—was too much occupied by parish details, upon which the latter desired his vicar's opinion or advice, to have time to see Mary Cope, though it was certainly his intention to do so, and he was vexed to find his interview with her must stand over for another day.

In the afternoon the services were reversed. Mr. Gray read prayers, Parson Hill preached. His text was, "Brethren, love one another;" and he expatiated on the comfort and value of love. Apart from that love which surpasses all other, the love of God to man, he spoke of domestic affection—and Isaac Watson's heartfelt sigh was startlingly loud—and neighbourly kindness. Of love as the great purifier from selfishness, as the preventer of quarrels, as the greatest human blessing that could be bestowed upon creatures like ourselves—binding heart to heart—walk-

ing together hand in hand from the cradle to the grave. "Love," said he, "in the words of a poet,

'Love makes all things to be glad.'

In suffering it is our comforter; it doubles our joy; it knits all human hearts together in one large pulse, that throbs from one end of the world to the other with like desires and hopes.

"Go, my friends," said he, in conclusion; "sorrows are sent to us by an Almighty hand, but, in the words of Scripture, I bid you 'comfort one another,' 'love one another,' and verily you will all meet your reward."

The different effect in the village caused by these two sermons can scarcely be told. The simple inhabitants all went to their homes comforted. Many a hearty blessing followed the parson's carriage as he was seen driving down the street to Paul Tavy.

"Isaac, lad—the passon has got a heart," said the Widow Simpson, as Isaac and herself were walking from church.

"Ay, mother," said Isaac.

"There be Mistress Cope a-coming, don't thee

mind I," said the old woman, attempting to draw away her arm from Isaac, "go to she, lad."

"Nay, mother, I shall not leave you," said Isaac, detaining her, and compelling her still to lean on his arm.

"Leastways us could wait for she," said the widow, standing still.

Mary and Isaac equally dreaded to meet, but from different causes. He feared that the sad event which followed so quickly upon their last conversation would bias her mind against him. She, ashamed to thrust herself as it were into the notice of a man who had—to express her own thoughts—"cast her off."

But they were compelled to meet nevertheless; for Isaac could not, in the face of the neighbours leaving the sacred edifice at the same time as himself and his mother, thus publicly go counter to her will, even if he had wished—and that too on the subject of Mary Cope, whom he so anxiously wished to preserve from the gossip of the curious. And so Isaac and his mother stood in the broad walk leading up to the church until they were joined by Mary Cope, who placed herself by the

side of the old woman, and they all three walked on together.

When they stepped from the churchyard into the main street, they heard the sound of wheels. Mary felt instinctively that it was Parson Hill's carriage. She did not dare to raise her eyes; she walked moodily on a few paces, and then was startled by a loud exclamation from Isaac, as he dropped the old woman's arm and rushed forward. Mary looked up in amazement. The carriage had turned the corner out of her sight, and Isaac, with a prayer of thankfulness on his lips, returned and resumed his place by his mother's side.

The facts were these: When Parson Hill saw the trio walking so cosily together, he turned as the carriage passed them, and gazed upon Mary with a look of anger and dissatisfaction. As she was unaware of this, and did not raise her head, Parson Hill still kept his eye upon her, hoping that, when she did look up, he should be able to impress upon her how great was his annoyance. But all this time, and while the parson's attention was given to Mary Cope, his horses trotted gently on, and when they came to the corner of the street, took it so

sharply, that only more by good luck than good management was the parson saved from an upset.

It was at the critical moment of danger that Isaac's exclamation came impulsively from his lips. This escape let loose his tongue, and opened his heart; he began to speak of the parson's sermon as so like the parson himself, who had a kind word and a kind feeling for everyone. Indeed, he was in the middle of a long speech, expatiating on all the well-known goodnesses of the parson, when they came to the turn that led by different routes to the two cottages—the school cottage, and the smithy cottage.

CHAPTER XX.

ON TWO EVENTS THAT DISTURB THE REPOSE OF THE VILLAGE OF LAWSLEIGH.

MARY COPE stopped, but the old woman took her by the arm, as she said,

"Don't thee go a-sitting by thee selfs—come along with Isaac and I."

Mary's reply rose in words to her throat, but there they stuck fast, and she looked down and blushed.

"It be fine and moonshiny at the night, and Isaac will walk home with thee—come."

"Would you come and have tea with me?" said Mary, for, thought she to herself, then Isaac need not come if he does not wish.

"Ay, wench, ay," said the old woman, "and thank thee kindly."

And she hastily seized Isaac's arm, and began to walk towards the school cottage.

But, excepting the garrulity of the old woman, who seemed intent on expressing her happiness in being invited to drink tea with Mary Cope, no one spoke. Mary was silent from a fear that Isaac would leave his mother at her cottage door, and turn away home. And Isaac from a doubt as to whether Mary would admit him. They were both prevented acting for themselves by the old woman, who did not withdraw her arm from Isaac's protection until she was safe in the cottage. And when there, and seated in Mary's easy-chair, she began to give her orders as if the cottage were her own, though, to say the truth, it was only done with a kind desire to relieve the two young people from an embarrassment that could not be hidden even from her simple and untutored mind.

"Mistress Cope, sit thee down. Isaac, lad, shut to the door, and then come and take away my hood."

Isaac did as he was told. He took the black camlet hood, lined and quilted, and of a curious

fashion, as compared with these days, and began to look round for a peg to hang it on.

"The lad doesna know this cottage so well as his own," said the old woman.

It was evident Isaac's shyness had returned; he found a place for the hood after some little search, and then he stood looking on without attempting to seat himself.

"I must stir up my fire," said Mary, jumping up eagerly.

But Isaac had now found something to do. He seized the poker before Mary could touch it, and so effectually stirred the fire, as to all but upset the kettle, which was standing partly on the hob, and partly on the fire. But this was quite enough —once more his tongue was unloosed, and Isaac spoke.

"I am very clumsy and stupid," said he, alluding to the toppling of the kettle, and, as he righted it, he added, "I cannot think why I am so stupid, and—" and the fire had another hearty good poke; but Mary interrupted him by saying:

"You stupid!—why, Isaac, you are the most clever and——"

But Mary turned her back suddenly upon Isaac, and began to talk to the old woman; her bonnet was slipping back as she stooped, and Isaac lifted it off her head, ostensibly to prevent it falling on the floor. Mary raised her eyes accidentally, and met his look full upon her—that look was quite enough. Isaac Watson felt that Mary Cope was not changed.

"I do think she has made up her mind to have me," said Isaac to himself, as he made great search for another peg or hook upon which to hang the bonnet.

"I do not think he can have deserted me," said Mary to herself, as she redoubled her attentions to the old woman, in the vain hope of hiding her satisfaction at the turn affairs were taking. "The kettle boils, I see," said Mary, aloud.

"And where is the clome (china), Mary?" said Isaac, in the very same glad tones she remembered so well.

For the moment she was too happy to speak. She walked hastily across the little room, and opened a corner cupboard, where in all its purity stood Mary Cope's clome.

"Not those—oh! no, not those!" said Mary, as Isaac began to take down the cups and saucers she had in daily use.

"You can reach to the top shelf, that is the good of being so tall, and there is the clome that I shall use this day."

And Mary even adopted the Devonshire word "clome" in her gladness of heart; though, we must admit that, as a rule, she did not use the patois of the moor. And we must pardon her pride in her china; for she was proud of it, and never attempted to hide that she was so. Nothing like it had ever been seen in the village of Lawsleigh—a perfect set of real Nankin, brought from China by Mary's grandfather. It was doubted if even the vicarage could produce a set like it. And so Isaac handed down the quaint teapot, the tea-caddy, the cream-jug with a lid, the tiny cups and saucers, and the sugar-basin. And now the old woman, peering with her aged eyes into all this finery, begged she might be made useful; and Mary gave her a soft napkin wherewith to dust the precious service, while she, as she called it, "whipped up the cream-jug and just ran over to Farmer Smithson

for some cream," that thick Devonshire cream, the pride of the county!

And then, when the tea was made, and they were cosily seated enjoying the fresh butter and delicious bread, Mary wished, "she had known beforehand that she was to be so happy, and have such nice company, for then she would have had some hot cakes just ready."

But both the old woman and Isaac thought everything Mary had was perfect, and everything she did or said the same; and, as they contrived to make her very well aware of their thoughts, Mary would have been ungrateful if she had not felt happy—at least, for the time being.

At length they began to discuss the parson's sermon; by some strange internal agreement they did not mention Mr. Gray's, but "Parson Hill's discourse they would never forget to the end of their days."

"I be a-thinking as it be love as makes us all so happy," said the old woman; "the passon be right most times."

"Yes," said Isaac, fervently, "humanly speak-

ing, love is the great purifier from the natural evil in our hearts. I know nothing more powerful in arresting a man's progress through the paths of vice than an honest love for a pure-hearted and gentle woman. The contrast of her angel-like innocence with his own demoniacal sins and follies shews him very plainly the great gulf that lies between them, awakens him to the enormity of his own wickedness, and attracts him to her as the reward of his amendment."

Isaac looked at Mary, who blushed a bright and happy blush.

"But," resumed he, "the parson meant to inculcate the virtue of charity—love to one's neighbour."

"Ay, lad, it be so; the passon meaned us all to love one another—and so us does," said the widow, looking at Mary; and then, turning to Isaac, she added, "But, I tell thee, lad, I be a-going down to my grave with peace. Now as I be sure thee hast got a good wife, or, leastways, as thee be a-going to wed, let alone the love as the passon meaned, I be glad as thee loves Mistress Cope, and as she loves thee, lad."

She took hold of Mary's hand as she spoke, and pressed it between her own as she added,

"He hath ever been a gude son to I, and he will make thee a gude husband."

Mary cast down her eyes, but did not reply.

When they had finished tea, and Mary began to remove the china on to a back table, Isaac made himself useful in attempting to help her. It was during their turns up and down the little room that they contrived to get a better understanding with each other.

"Do you wish me to go away?" said Isaac, softly, when they were at a distance from the old woman.

"To go!—oh! no."

"Poor dear old mother does not understand—you see she thinks we are——"

"I am sure, Isaac, I do not understand," said Mary, with a little burst of petulance; "if you wish to go, of course you must."

By this time the old woman had wisely laid her head back in Mary's comfortable chair, and covered her head and face with her apron. In the fear of disturbing her, we suppose, Isaac and Mary now

conversed in whispers, apart from the tea-table.

"Mary, dear, you are too good to say anything just to make me unhappy—just to pride yourself upon me, as many would—why then do you say, 'if *I* wish to go?'"

"Why?—you have left me all this long time," and Mary turned pale at the remembrance of her own sufferings; "I thought perhaps you wished to go away——"

"I dare not come, Mary," interrupted Isaac. "I could not blame you if you did withdraw your promise. I know I am not worthy of you, although I will try every day to make myself more so. I know that the horrible event which has very justly filled the whole village with dread, must operate against me in a mind so pure and gentle as yours. I know everybody, except poor mother, will warn you to avoid me—will laud you for giving me up. I know you have nothing to gain; and I have life, honour, a good name, and a blessed future hanging by a thread. I dare not come, Mary. My stake was too heavy. I dreaded to know that I had lost you. I have borne with the suspense, cruel though it has been. I will still bear it, if you

will, rather than hear myself cast off from all future hope."

"But you never mean to go to that 'Pack-horse' again, Isaac?—you will keep that promise to me?"

"I will keep it, Mary, as sure as there is a God in Heaven," said Isaac, fervently, "and by his help."

"Massy me!—and where be I to?" said the old woman, as she pulled back her muslin apron, and stared round the cottage.

Mary and Isaac were by her side in a moment. And for the remainder of the widow's visit she busied herself in examining, with Mary's help, all the articles of furniture that she was unaccustomed to see. When she had sufficiently gratified her curiosity, she said,

"Isaac, lad, I can go back by my own self—my old bones will ache if I stop out when the sun be gone down."

I need hardly add that Isaac would not suffer his mother to go by herself; and Mary Cope was once more left alone.

We must pass rapidly over this part of our story. On the following Sunday, Parson Hill again drove into the village of Lawsleigh, for the purpose of assisting Mr. Gray in the duties of the day. The criticisms on the respective sermons of the vicar and the curate may be told in a few words.

"Well, widdy," said old Jacob Smerdon, "so that young one be at us again. I be minded as him has a-tooked a new text, and preached the very same sermon."

"I be minded to the same, Jacob," said the old woman; "all about murdererses, and drunkardses, and liarses, and thievesses, and gossipses, and every bad thing!"

"I be fair ill-tempered with he," said Jacob.

"It be cruel unbecoming of he," said the widow.

"But the cheery passon, widdy—there be a man!" and Jacob gave his thigh a hearty slap to enforce the strength of his opinion.

"Ay, Jacob, him be the man; and let alone the whole earth to find another such!"

"Him tooked the very same text, widdy!"

said Jacob, tapping loudly with his stick on the floor.

"The very same, Jacob," said the widow. "Brethrenses, love one another."

"But much differenter words in the sermon, widdy," said Jacob; "forbye they meaned the very same. Him be a most mazing passon, widdy."

"Him be so comforting-like—a comforting to us heartses as likes to love one anothers. Jacob, I loves the passon."

"Ay, widdy, so does I; and God bless the passon!" said Jacob, with another heavy blow upon his own flesh.

And a third Sunday came round, and the same events occurred. Mr. Gray preached in the morning, and denounced vengeance on all who persisted in their wickedness; at the same time that he accused his congregation of living in the habitual commission of heinous sins. While Parson Hill still took the same text, "Love ye one another."

Again the village gossips descanted on the two sermons and the two preachers. And it was clearly to be seen in that little community that they *did*

love each other more and more; that they loved to do little neighbourly acts, and to encourage among themselves kind neighbourly ways, because the parson taught them these things so gently.

It was in the midst of the talk on the subject of the two parsons that the news came about Peter Barker. He had been tried for manslaughter, and convicted on circumstantial evidence. He was committed to prison for two years, to the horror and grief of the inhabitants of Lawsleigh. It cast a gloom over the whole parish; people, when they met, shook their heads, and spoke in whispers; they were shocked at Peter's fate, and ashamed of the disgrace to the village. They wished the parson would come home; they did not think they should feel safe from harm until he did.

One morning, however, a very bright morning, soon after this consternation throughout the parish, the bells of Lawsleigh burst out into a merry peal, and the people rushed to their doors.

"Be the passon a-come back?" said one.

"Us doesna know," said others.

"Be the young lads a-larning theyselves to ring?" questioned some.

knew, if he allowed banns to be published, they would be forbidden. But a license, properly obtained, would secure his prize.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHICH TREATS OF ENLARGING THE SMITHY COTTAGE.

AT the end of this week Parson Hill returned. By this time Mary felt so happy in her new home, and Isaac so thankful to have her, that all we can say is, they were both contented with their bargain.

There had been a little difficulty at first as to which house they should live in for the future. Mary feeling sure that there was plenty of room in her cottage for the good widow; and, besides, being more roomy, it possessed advantages not to be found in the smithy cottage, inasmuch as it was fitted up with grates—things unknown amongst the dwellers on the moor, because the natural fuel of

the locality, turf, is easily procured, and coal is difficult to obtain, and expensive. Turf is burnt upon the hearth, rendering the modern grate unnecessary.

"And then," said Mary, "as the school cottage belongs to the school, it seems but proper that the schoolmistress should dwell there."

Some people have a strange faculty for casting away care. Mary had been distinctly told by Parson Hill that she must choose between Isaac and the school. And though this announcement troubled her greatly when it was originally made, day by day it faded from her mind, until at length it was forgotten.

Up to the time of her marriage, or, rather, of her complete understanding with Isaac, she had occasionally cheered herself by the recollection that now "she should keep the school;" but after her wedding-day was fixed, and after that ceremony had taken place, by a strange perversity she forgot that the gain of Isaac for her husband must be weighed against the loss of the school.

Isaac, as he was more experienced than Mary, saw more clearly into the probabilities of the

future. He did not disturb her happy frame of mind by suppositions of what that future might produce; but he foresaw too surely that as soon as the parson returned she would lose her employment.

Mary had continued to attend the school just as usual, and in a perfectly contented frame of mind. But when the news of the vicar's return spread through the village, she felt a strange unusual awe creep over her at the thought of meeting him. She had never seen him, except during the services of the church, since the day that he had so entreated her to "give him up." But Mary had not "given him up." A new light seemed suddenly to break upon her, and she asked herself, "Oh, why did I leave my own cottage?" She had left the cottage belonging to the school at Isaac's request, for in his own mind he thought, "when she is married she has no right to it," and she had gone on her wedding-day to reside at the smithy. At the time this seemed a simple arrangement, hardly worthy of remark, because so unimportant in itself; it was more convenient, and Mary saw no objection. But the expected sound

of the parson's voice made Mary reflect more on her present position than she had hitherto done, and now she blamed herself for her want of foresight; it appeared to her that "by having left the cottage appropriated to the schoolmistress she had virtually given up the school."

Mary did not, however, impart her troublous thoughts to Isaac. She was a shade less cheerful, and two shades more thoughtful, and Isaac did not require to be told what was passing in her mind. And on the Saturday evening, when two carriages passed the smithy, containing Parson Hill, and the party from Paul Tavey, Isaac put aside his own work, and calling Mary to him, opened out to her a plan for their future comfort, that so arrested her attention for the time being, and occupied her mind afterwards, as completely to extinguish for that night the care that had been corroding her thoughts.

"You see, my dear," said Isaac, "I have always known this old house would never do for you. You require more comforts, and you shall have them. We who are born and brought up on the moor, as we have never known anything better

than humble dwellings, moderately stored with furniture, and turf fires blazing on the naked hearth—because, my dear, the turf is handy on the moor, and the smithy has a right to gather—so we never require or desire anything better. But you are different; you come from the South o' Devon, where the climate is genial, and luxury abounds. And I have been thinking of building a couple of rooms, or so——"

"Isaac, how kind of you!" said Mary.

"And I have a plan in my head, upon which I should like your opinion."

"It is so good of you to be always thinking of me," said Mary, gratefully.

"I must first build a new shed out there in the garden. You see I cannot get on without a shed; and the front shed *must* open into the back, as it does now, because there my men are at work; so all this part," continued he, pointing out to her comprehension the shed or workshops used by Isaac and his men when at work, "must be removed. We must build two nice rooms where the sheds now stand, and then place the sheds on the other side, still abutting on the house."

"What a great deal of trouble you will have," said Mary, as she looked round the shed in which they were standing, and saw the numerous tools lying about; and as she opened the door of the inner shop or shed, she exclaimed—

"Why, Isaac, you can never move all this great lot of things—such great heavy things—and——"

"At first I thought of building the rooms outside the sheds, just there in the garden."

"Yes; that would be very pretty; and so have a window to look all down the street."

"To be sure," said Isaac, heartily; "I never thought of that; and as you say, my dear, that would be very pretty; and the little garden might grow up to the window."

"Yes, it might; and the sweet mignonette and the nice violets might grow under the window."

"But, Mary," said Isaac, looking a shade more serious, "you see, if I build the new rooms there, and have the sheds standing as they are, the old house and the new will be apart from each other."

"Yes—but that is nothing; because you can have a door open into the shed on the other side, the very same as it does on this."

"But I only mean to build two rooms. One on the ground floor, warm and comfortable for you, and one over for a bedroom for us."

"Yes; but why, then, is there a difficulty more on the one side than the other?"

Two difficulties presented themselves to Isaac's mind, only one of which he mentioned to Mary.

"Why, if I build on to the old house, the same stairs will do; and, of course, much less work in the walls. If I build here, I must have a better and a more substantial wall than this," indicating the outside wall of the shed, which was only composed of large stones loosely fastened together.

He did not say, I should not like to leave the good old mother all alone, as it were, in a house by herself; for so it would seem, he thought, if the rooms were so separated.

"Then there could not be the window to look down the street, Isaac; neither the sweet smell of flowers coming in with the air."

"We cannot have everything," said Isaac, philosophically, and hoping to turn Mary's mind to see that the other was the better of the two plans.

"Shall we ask mother," said Mary, "which she will like best?"

"No," said Isaac, as he occupied himself by looking up and examining the roof of his shed; and left Mary to digest the monosyllable as well as she could.

"No?" said she, inquiringly; "why not, Isaac? Mother likes to give her opinion, and I like her to have it, and I thought you did also."

Isaac had now found an occupation in measuring the length and width of his shed by his own paces, and remained silent.

"Isaac, dear, don't you like mother to have her opinion?"

"Certainly I do."

"Then, tell me, why don't you like me to ask her about this?"

"You may ask her, if you wish," said Isaac, who had now brought Mary's curiosity to the right point, and therefore condescended further to add,

"Mother is very unselfish, Mary, and of my own accord I should not ask her, because I know beforehand she will decide against herself."

Mary's perceptions were not very clear on that Saturday evening. She certainly could not see what the widow would have to resign by having the old house made larger, and thus more comfortable.

"Well, Isaac, I cannot see what there is to give up," said Mary, a little pettishly; for it is astonishing how prosperity beguiles us into wilfulness; and Mary was not proof against the, to her, prosperity of the last week.

"Well, my dear, I thought I would just ask if you would like to have me build two rooms for you; and we need not settle all in a breath exactly how and where they shall be. I agree to build them—you agree to occupy them; and there we will wait a bit, and see how things turn out."

This judicious speech on Isaac's part quieted Mary in an instant. By some intuitive feeling she understood he did not wish for any more discussion just then on the subject; and she also saw there was something in Isaac's mind connected

with the Widow Simpson that would cause him to build close to the old house if possible. But she was so occupied with her own happy position of the past week, and with the hope of retaining it in the future, she could not see the lonely position of the old woman.

As Mary had had permission from Isaac to bring the old woman's wisdom into the conferences on the subject of the addition to the cottage, she lost no time in apprising her of the anticipated change.

"It be like to you and like to Isaac," said the widow.

"You will like it, mother," said Mary, not comprehending what the old woman meant.

"Blessings on thee!" said the widow, heartily. "I say it be like to both on ye—like to Isaac, and like to you—to be a-thinking on I. I said to myself, mayhap Mary will coax the lad to go and live in she's pretty cottage; but you both on you think of I, and I be so glad as I shall not have to live all by my own self, and thanks to you, my dear!"

"Why, mother, we should never think of leav-

ing you!" said Mary. "Don't you remember when I thought my cottage—that is, you know, mother it is as good as my own," added she, with a little pride, "for it is on purpose for the schoolmistress, as I am. And when we thought it would be better to live there, we meant to take you with us."

"Ay, ay, but I sim I knowed betterer," said the old woman. "I knowed I was not the schoolmistress of Lawsleigh,"—and she laughed heartily at the drollness of the idea—"and mayhap the passon might tell I to get out of that!"

"Then we should have gone out also," said Mary, as an undefined fear crept through her. "But you see, mother, if Isaac builds two rooms, we can all three be together so nicely; and my furniture and books and things can be brought here."

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW MARY WATSON WENT TO MEET PARSON HILL AT THE VILLAGE SCHOOL, AND OF WHAT BEFELL HER BY THE WAY.

BEFORE the close of the conversation related in the last chapter, the old woman had made Mary comprehend that the nearer the new rooms were built to the old ones, the better she should like them; and then Mary gradually saw through Isaac's meaning, without anything more definite being said by him.

When this clearly dawned upon her perceptive faculties, she blamed herself for having argued the matter with him, because she thought it might appear to be taking a selfish part against the old

woman. Mary was free from errors of this nature, and Isaac had a just understanding of her real character, and a thorough appreciation of it. This prevented any dangerous misunderstanding from arising between them on that point.

On the Sunday Isaac was a good deal occupied with the bells and the choir, and the duties of the day—as was Mary, also, with the school and the choir. Mary had passed the day happily, for Parson Hill had neither perceptibly slighted her nor bestowed his notice upon her. Her spirits rose with her contentment, and she now almost longed for the interview she had a short time previously so greatly dreaded.

On the Monday morning the inmates of the smithy were up with the lark, and at their early breakfast Isaac's contemplated improvement was the topic of conversation. Mary gave her opinion unasked in a most decided tone, that it would be better to build the two rooms close to the old cottage, and not on the other side of the shed. And then Isaac became playfully ungenerous, and pointed out that she would not have a charming window, to take in at one view the whole length

of the village street, the rustic bridge over the brooklet, and the church-tower on the hill. That she could have no mignonette or violets, because the window must look west. And to crown the whole of the discomforts of placing the rooms close to the house, there could not be a door into the new shed, because there must be a chimney somewhere!

At first Mary was fairly taken aback by all this wicked persiflage, and began to think she had even misunderstood his former intention; but Isaac, who—deep fellow as he was!—could read every expression of Mary's face in an instant, took himself up without more ado, and comforted her by his ardent praise of her proposal.

"But, Mary dear, it is like you to say we will have the new rooms join to the old house; for, to tell you the truth, I should not like to be sleeping in a grand room over the way, as it would seem to me, and leaving my good mother in the old house all by herself. It is so comfortable to feel we shall be all together; and I am sure, my dear, I am very grateful that you have such a kindly feeling on the subject."

"And where be ye to have the chimney put to?" said the old woman.

"Well, mother, we will find a place; 'where there is a will there is a way,' and it is clear where there is a grate there must be a chimney. And then, Mary, all your nice furniture, that the good parson thought I coveted so," said Isaac, with a wicked smile, that poor innocent Mary did not in the least comprehend—"your furniture, my dear, can be moved into the two new rooms, and we shall be as happy as kings and queens can ever be!"

And when the time came for Mary to set off to the school, Isaac had entirely talked away her casual fear of losing it, by occupying and delighting her mind with his suggested improvements at the smithy.

And now, instead of desponding with the fear of dismissal, she seemed perfectly assured of retaining the school; and instead of setting forth at a slow pace, and with a heavy heart, she was ready a few minutes earlier than usual, and felt as if she could fly on the wings of the wind to meet Parson Hill, and once more apply herself heart

and soul to the well-known duties of her beloved school.

"He will not like me to come away from the school-cottage," said she to herself, as she bounded along. "I know the parson likes that cottage, and thinks it so pretty and so suitable for a school-mistress; and so it is. And I am sure I have often been quite delighted with the way in which he would point out to me the windmill on the top of the very distant hill, only seen like a white speck on a clear day, just as we can see Moorgarten Spire when the sun shines on it, though it is ever so far off. But then it is white." And here she paused a little, for she had brought up Moorgarten Spire as a simile, and had to go back in her mind, and recall the parson's speeches; and when she had found the place from whence she had diverged, she continued her talk to herself. "And the farmstead in the hollow, and the group of thorn in the parson's own glebe, and the Tors everywhere around. Oh! but he is a kind man, is the parson! and so clever—that is, I mean, talks so beautifully, makes one understand so many things; and I cannot think how I can have the

heart to tell him I shall move my furniture to the smithy; for he gave me a good many things—that nice couch—there is not another in the whole village—and my work-table, and my pretty, pretty book-shelves, and oh! so many nice books—indeed, he is always giving me presents of one kind or other. No; I cannot tell him to-day about my furniture; I have not the heart. I must wait—yes, wait—until the new rooms at the smithy are nearly ready; and then he will come and see them his own self, and maybe say to me, in his kind voice—'And so, Mary, you will have to remove all your nice furniture down here, or——'"

But Mary's happy thoughts were put a stop to for the time being, by one of the servants from the vicarage, who said—

"He was going to the smithy on purpose to see her."

Mary's first idea was that she was late, and she said innocently, as the man stood fumbling in his pockets.

"Is the parson at the school? Has he sent for me?

"I don't know, Mistress Cope," said the man,

ignoring Mary's claim to a change of name. "The passon be at his breakfast, and he sent you this here note."

The man turned sharply on his heel as soon as he had delivered the note, and set off in a sort of jog-trot home again; while Mary unceremoniously opened the note as she stood, and read—

"Mary Watson,—Your services are no longer required at the village school of Lawsleigh. You will——"

Poor Mary! the earth seemed suddenly to turn round with her, large tears fell heavily on the paper, which she hastily crumpled in her hand, and turning round attempted to walk home.

At first her limbs trembled so, she could hardly put one foot before another; and to add to her troubles, she met almost immediately Jane Sands, who stopped at some little distance from Mary as she was slowly retracing her steps, and staring rudely at her, said—

"I thought ye was a ghost, Mistress Watson—you be so white as any of they ghosteses as be a-walking over the earth continually!"

Mary walked on, trying to look unconcerned,

but she did not reply to the greeting of Jane Sands; she was too much absorbed in her own sorrows, and too eager to escape notice from every one. Her silence however, angered the woman, and she continued—

"Umph! You be uncommon proud, you be; and you be a white-faced doll, that you be! And you has never gived I the penny as——"

But Mary made a great effort to quicken her pace, and get away from the rudeness of Jane; for though the note had only that instant been put into her hands, she thought all the village knew of her disgrace, and that consequently she might expect an insult from every person she met. Fortunately, at the turn of a corner, she lost the sound of Jane's harsh tones, and, feeling this a relief, she tried to walk faster, but her attitude was desponding and her eyes cast on the ground. Presently she heard heavy hasty steps approaching, and, dreading a foe in every sound, she raised her head, and saw, within a few paces of her, Isaac Watson, who advanced without speaking, and tenderly drawing her arm within his own, led her to the smithy.

Isaac had foreseen that Mary would not be received at the school, and he was therefore ready to meet her the moment she turned the corner into the main street. And then, under the shelter of the smithy roof, and with Isaac's protecting arm around her, Mary read and re-read the little note that blighted—as she thought—her happiness for ever. Its purport was to dismiss her from the school as mistress of it, and to desire her to remove her furniture within three days "from the cottage that was intended solely for the use of the school-mistress of the village of Lawsleigh."

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WHICH ISAAC WATSON GOES TO THE VICARAGE.

MR. GRAY made no mention to Parson Hill of Isaac's marriage until Sunday evening. And then, as a matter of course, it was decreed by the two gentlemen that Mary must be dismissed from the school on the following morning. Few things in his whole life had affected Parson Hill more than this marriage. To use his own words, "the very announcement of it made him feel ten years older," as if a sudden blight had fallen upon him. He became silent and reserved in his own family circle. Neither Charlie's ready wit nor Mrs. Harcourt's fine music seemed to have power to draw him from the absorption of his own

thoughts. He never mentioned either Mary or Isaac, and thus his visitors were unaware that the two people in whom they were all three much interested were actually married.

But on the Tuesday, when Mrs. Hill was making her toilette for dinner, Charlie suddenly entered the room.

"You may go, Jones," said Mrs. Hill to her maid; and as soon as the door was closed, she turned to Charlie, and said, "something strange will surely happen when you are ready before me!"

"Something strange is happening. I am uncomfortable, disturbed in mind, and really I do not know whether to tell the governor or not! I hate spoiling sport, but then I cannot endure deceit!" and Charlie began to pace the room impatiently.

"What is it?" said Mrs. Hill, suspending the finishing touches to her toilette in her anxiety.

"Why that great big bear, Isaac Watson, is carrying off the furniture that belongs to the pretty schoolmistress—taking it away from the school cottage! I forgot to tell you last night, for

that charming Widow Harcourt takes up so much of your time I am left in the shade."

"A very happy shade for you; but do go on.

"Why, last night, I saw symptoms of a moonlight flitting at Mary Cope's cottage."

Mrs. Hill made no remark, though Charlie paused sufficiently long.

"Now, if that young woman is stealing away in the dark, she is not worthy of the kiss I have always intended to give to her on a fitting occasion."

"Are you then going to speak to Mr. Hill?"

"Nay, Kate, I want your opinion. The governor is unusually moody, I can hardly get 'a rise' out of him; therefore I do not wish to add to the weight of care he seems so burdened with just at this time. And yet I cannot take the young woman's part, for it is clearly wrong to steal away her goods in that way. If she wants to marry Isaac, as I suppose she does, why, then marry him openly; take away her goods the same, and, in spite of the governor's objection to the marriage, I would not mind standing treat. But to anger the dear old governor, whose opposition to their blessed union is all on the side of good-

ness—to anger him by such dirty work as moonlight flittings, to confess the truth, angers me too."

"Perhaps you are misinformed."

"Wisest of your sex! I saw with my own eyes what I have ventured to assert."

"I do not believe it," said Mrs. Hill, turning away and attending to the finishing of her toilette.

"Very well; I have done," said Charlie as he moved towards the door.

"Do not go away, Charlie; let us come to some understanding as to what will be the best to do."

Charlie turned round, and hesitated, standing with the door open.

"Now, Charlie, dear, do not go; I want you."

"When you venture to call a man a liar I wonder how you can open your mouth the next minute to ask a favour from him," said Charlie, still standing with the door open.

"I did not use such language!" said Mrs. Hill, surprised at the accusation.

"You said you did not believe me."

"I do not believe that Mary Cope is stealing away from her cottage," said Mrs. Hill, pettishly;

" do not mistake me so, Charlie—nay, indeed, you understood well enough what I meant."

" I know, you might as well speak good English as bad," said Charlie, laughing, as he closed the door, and once more leaned his back against the wardrobe; " and I can tell you I would not have believed it of Mary, if I had not seen it."

" Mrs. Harcourt and I both remarked that Mary Cope looked very pretty on Sunday; she had on such a becoming bonnet, and——"

" Well," said Charlie, impatiently, " what has a bonnet to do with a moonlight flitting?"

" Do you think it possible they are already married?"

" Married! no; why, they could not marry without having their banns called, or going to the governor for a license—the former would be forbidden, the latter refused."

" Then you think she is first taking her goods safely away, and then going to another church to be married?"

" Indeed I do not know what she means to do first, I do not know any of her meanings from first to last; I do not know the meaning of Isaac walk-

ing off with the goods by moonlight. I tell you I am uncomfortable—there will be a row—and," said Charlie, as a little tap at the door arrested his attention, and then, speaking in a low key, he added, "I heartily wish the Widow Harcourt was safely married to the governor, and then she would not have time to break in upon——"

But, by this time, he had opened the door, and, putting out his hand to Mrs. Harcourt, he said,

"Come, come, come in—did you think we wanted your opinion? Now, tell me honestly—did you?"

"I can give it, if you ask me," said she, laughing.

She was then taken into their counsels, and she, like Mrs. Hill, did not believe any evil of Mary. Her opinion was to say nothing to Mr. Hill on the matter of the removal of the goods, unless he himself introduced the subject.

"In multitude of counsel there is wisdom," said Charlie, as he opened the door, and the party descended to dinner.

During dinner a message was brought to Parson Hill, to the purport that Isaac Watson had called

again, and the vicar was reminded in an undertone by his old servant, George, that this was the third time.

"Isaac Watson!" said the parson, in an angry tone; "tell him I am engaged."

After a little time the man returned with,

"Isaac's duty to his honour, and when would Parson Hill please to see him?"

"Never!" said the angry parson, motioning the man away.

Charlie, however, unnoticed by Mr. Hill, quietly left the table, and went to Isaac.

"Well, Isaac, what is the matter?" said Charlie.

And Isaac very soon told Charlie all the circumstances of the marriage, and also explained to him what had before seemed difficult to understand in the removal of Mary's goods. And further, Isaac made known his present business with the vicar, viz., that there were some book-shelves at the cottage that Mary claimed as her own, alleging that Parson Hill had given them to her; and Isaac wished to know if the shelves were a present to Mary individually, or only to the schoolmistress for the time being.

"Are they fixtures, Isaac?"

"No, sir, they are strung together with cords, and hung up."

"Then if Mistress Watson—tell her I wish her much happiness—if she has any liking for the shelves, I advise you to take them."

"What did the parson mean, do you think, Master Charlie, when he had the shelves made?"

"He meant them for Mary—that is, for Mistress Watson—she is very pretty, Isaac—of course he did."

"But I do not wish to anger the parson."

"Oh! he is—he is eating his dinner; I will tell him I have advised you to take them. Good-bye, Isaac. I shall come and see your wife, and drink her health; and I do now heartily wish you both much happiness—tell her so, will you."

And Isaac went away with a blessing on his lips for that kind-hearted Master Charlie; and removed the book-shelves with a clear conscience. And Charlie returned to the dining-room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHICH TREATS OF PARSON HILL'S OPINION OF ISAAC WATSON.

WHEN the ladies retired, Parson Hill attacked Charlie immediately with,

"And so you must needs go and speak to that drunkard, Isaac Watson! I think you would have behaved better if you had kept your seat at the table."

"So do I, sir—to the company present."

"Umph!—I cannot think you improved by marriage, Charlie. Your wife ruins you—I would not let a woman ruin me—of course I mean in manner, in bearing."

Charlie thought of "the governor's" fate, if he should marry Mrs. Harcourt, and tried hard to refrain from a smile.

"Marriage improves most people," resumed the vicar; "why do you make yourself an exception?"

"Perhaps marriage may improve Isaac," said Charlie, as if thinking aloud; "I hope *he* will not turn out an exception to the general rule."

"Umph!" said the parson again; and then, after a little pause, he added with a sneer, "it will improve the late schoolmistress of Lawsleigh, un-doubt-ed-ly."

"I declare, I thought she was making a moonlight 'flit,' as the people say, when I saw Isaac carrying away her goods last night."

"I wish you could find some other subject wherewith to entertain me. Do you think it a matter of congratulation that the best schoolmistress in the—in—in the world," said he at last, and raising his voice in his anger, "should neglect her duties and marry a drunkard?"

"No, sir, I think it wrong in schoolmistresses generally to neglect their duties; and very wrong in any one of the sisterhood to marry a drunkard. But I thought you always had hopes that Isaac would turn out well at last—that he would, in fact,

give up tobacco and cider, and perhaps take 'the pledge.' And as he has so fairly pledged himself within this last week," continued Charlie, alluding to Isaac's marriage, "who knows but that he may go on with the good work, and take a total abstinence pledge after all."

"He was seen coming out of the 'Packhorse' last night, reeling drunk!—he and that other drunkard, Jacob Smerdon."

Charlie now wisely held his peace.

"When I am next on the bench, I mean to speak of that woman's house and practices, and get her license taken away, as I forewarned her," said Parson Hill.

"Which is the woman you mean to unlicense—Isaac, Jacob, or the 'Packhorse?'" said Charlie.

It was now the vicar's turn to be silent.

"You see, the bad Widow Mason at the 'Packhorse' supplies wayfaring men, and she is the only bad widow in the parish; and I do not myself see what the parish will gain if we exchange her for a worse."

Charlie paused, but the vicar did not reply.

"Wayfaring men must be supplied, or they will die in severe weather as they cross the moor."

The vicar rested his head on his hand, and did not speak.

"The 'Packhorse' may be a bad sign; but what can be the use of changing it for a better, unless indeed there is any good in making the sign more attractive? As for Isaac and Jacob having been seen coming out, I must admit it is very disgraceful of the patriarchs."

"Well, Charlie, you seem to take things very easily, but I can tell you I am thoroughly unhappy. Here is a young woman, modest, good-looking, well educated for her station, and able to get her own living in a respectable way; and she suddenly turns round, casts to the dogs all her good qualities, and gives herself up to a reprobate!—to one who, though young in years—I do not think the man is more than five or six-and-twenty—is old in iniquity. Nay, Charlie," for he had made an ineffectual attempt to interrupt Mr. Hill, "you have had your say, let me have mine. If Isaac were, as I had once too foolishly hoped he might

sooner or later become, a changed man, I would be the first to bless his union with Mary Cope. But his conduct for the last month or two has been execrable, past all bearing! Gray tells me he took infinite pains and trouble with the man during my absence in town, calling frequently at the smithy cottage, and trying to conciliate him; and it is a well known fact, Charlie," said the vicar, his anger rising with his subject, "that Isaac Watson went oftener to the 'Packhorse' at that time than he had ever before been known to do! What do you think of that?"

Charlie remained silent.

"Of course you know," resumed Parson Hill, "it was in a drunken fit he so disfigured Mary's face for the time being! One morning, when I was riding across the moor to Paul Tavey, Gray stopped the bells. He afterwards told me the men were *all* drunk! But that sly Isaac came to me on the evening of the same day apparently sober," continued he, shaking his head, "and I hastily concluded Gray had been mistaken; whereas, *now* I feel sure he was right. I myself saw him come out of the school cottage reeling drunk when that

silly little milliner was staying with Mary; and last night—only last night, Charlie—Gray saw him come reeling out of the 'Packhorse.' These are only a small number of the iniquities that can be proved against Isaac," added the vicar, unconsciously exaggerating the truth in his anger. "And now pray what would you have, Charlie!"

"I would have Isaac a better man."

"A better man, indeed—indeed," said the vicar, with a lugubrious shake of the head; "now I told that foolish young woman that he only wanted to marry her for his own ends, but I could not drive it into her! I told her he would break his word—for he had actually sworn never to enter the 'Packhorse' again!—break his word in a week—and you see my words are true, and more than true, for they have not been married a week—this is Tuesday, and Gray married them last Wednesday. Now, Charlie, if you have any respect for my word, I ask—can you have any respect for Isaac Watson?"

"I have the greatest respect for you, sir," said Charlie, "and the greatest reliance on your word, but the puzzle to me is, that Isaac never appears bad! See him where you will, speak to him on

any subject, and he is a respectable, sensible, just, and intelligent man, always greatly ashamed of his weakness for cider and tobacco, and yet, somehow, contriving, even with this failing, to keep his place in my heart, and, until now, I thought he did in yours."

"Alas! yes, you are right, Charlie. There has ever been about the man a something that has seemed to keep him still respectable, even though it was patent to all that he sinned vilely."

"I never saw him in a state of inebriety."

"And, strangely enough, Charlie, nor have I, excepting on those occasions I mentioned; but, though I have not seen him, I have heard him go singing down the street, and of course I have known but too well what was the matter. And sometimes, Charlie, boy, my conscience has reproached me that perhaps I have felt too sure of Isaac's reformation, though he still continued to sin, and so looked upon him with a kindly eye. For, with all my efforts to save poor Peter Barker, I could not look upon him as I did upon Isaac, and I too often turned from him cast down, dispirited, and hopeless of success."

"He was not a man of the same stamp," said Charlie; "and I am sure, my dear father, you ought to be comforted now with the recollection of your own great goodness to so thorough a reprobate as Peter! Your great forbearance and——"

"Ah! Charlie, it may seem well to you to try to comfort me, but I feel as if I were beyond such a luxury. I tried to conciliate Peter, hoping to gain power over him, and lead him on gradually to better things. But now that his sin has so surely found him out, I reproach myself that I was not more stern towards him—more active in trying to put down the bad house that sheltered him in his evil hours and encouraged him in his wickedness; for there can be no doubt that the 'Packhorse' and the Widow Mason are at the root of these evils."

"I cannot see, in these days of 'Temperance Leagues,' and other institutions for the amendment of the conduct of certain classes," said Charlie—"I cannot see why we are to be bored with cider-shops! You, I suppose, can take away the Widow Mason's license; but can you prevent another cider-shop from being opened?"

"If the widow transgresses the law, she forfeits her license; but there is often a difficulty in proving the actions of such people. And then one crime so causes another, one almost shrinks from the responsibility; so many lies are told, so many swear falsely. You see, Charlie, boy, all the bad would swear for the widow that black was white. Your very good friend, Isaac Watson, taking up her cause, with his clever tongue and respectable appearance, backed by his bosom friend, old Jacob Smerdon, would—would——"

"Certainly very much astonish me if he were to attempt to swear that black was white for the sake of the Widow Mason! No, no, Isaac is not so bad as that!"

"Well! well!" resumed the vicar, "the good do not like being mixed up in such cases—they do not like to be called forward to prove that such a disorderly scene was enacted when Parson So-and-so requested they would look into this and that. Stop, Charlie,"—for he again attempted to interrupt the vicar—"I am not going to shrink from my bounden duty because it is beset with difficulties; trust me, I will have the 'Pack-

horse' razed from the ground, and—and——"

"And the Widow Mason burned in effigy on the ruins thereof!" said Charlie.

Tea was announced at this moment; the conversation was interrupted, and the gentlemen proceeded to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW ISAAC WATSON BROKE HIS WORD, WENT TO THE "PACKHORSE," AND CAME BACK MUCH THE WORSE FOR HIS VISIT THERE.

BY degrees Isaac set himself to remove Mary's goods from the school-cottage to the smithy. Unfortunately he was not able to do this without help. He applied to one or two of the neighbours for the little assistance he required, but without success. Only old Jacob Smerdon could spare time to Isaac on the two nights pointed out to him by the vicar's note for the removal of the furniture from the school-cottage.

Jacob had promised to meet Isaac and Mary at the cottage at a given hour on Monday evening—the day Mary received the note. But after they

had occupied some time in packing up, ready for removal, a large number of things, as Jacob did not make his appearance, Isaac told Mary he would go and see after him. For the space of an hour, and more, Mary waited at the cottage for Isaac and Jacob, her mind anxious, it is true, for their coming, but not suspicious of evil.

She had been to the door to and fro, thus looking out for them, during the gathering together of her belongings, and they did not appear. But at length, on the stillness of the night air, she heard their voices. To her horror and dismay she heard the sounds of drunkenness, and almost sinking on the floor as she stood, she covered her face with her hands, and silently awaited their approach. They stopped at the cottage, but Mary did not move. She heard a confused sort of talking, words feebly uttered, and incomprehensible to her, and still she remained in the same attitude.

"Mary! Mary!" said Isaac's voice.

She tried to answer him, but her tongue refused her utterance.

"Mary! Mary! come here!"

Thus appealed to, and by the voice she loved,

the spell was broken, and she rushed to the door. Her disgust and panic were not lessened by the sight of Jacob leaning for support against the wall of the cottage.

"Mary dear!" continued Isaac, "I must take Jacob home. You see—he was not at his own cottage—he was at the 'Packhorse,' and he cannot reach his own door without my help. Shall you mind waiting till I come back?"

"Oh, no!" said Mary, cheerfully, as she retreated from the nauseous smell of cider; for now that she saw Isaac was sober, her spirits and her hopes revived.

"I will not be longer than I can help, Mary, and I am so sorry to leave you by yourself," said Isaac.

"Do not think of me," said she, kindly; her thankfulness and gratitude, in that Isaac had not broken his word, made her feel equal to any emergency.

In less than ten minutes Isaac returned. He caressed Mary very gently and kindly, and expressed his regret at the untoward circumstances that kept them so long about their work; and then

he added that he would remove as much as he could without help that night, for fortunately the moon was bright, and on the morrow Jacob would have recovered from his night's intemperance, and be able to keep his word.

And Isaac and Mary worked on together in the little cottage, completing the arrangements it was necessary to make for the removal of the goods.

At first Mary thought Isaac unusually silent; then she thought his face had a stern expression she had never before observed; soon she felt herself again uncomfortable, from a disagreeable whiff of the scent of cider every now and then.

She concluded she must "somehow have got it in her head" when she was so disgusted by Jacob. But afterwards, and most reluctantly, she became painfully convinced Isaac had broken his word: kept it to the letter, since he was not in the same state as Jacob, but broken it in spirit, for he had certainly had cider in his absence. She could not go near to him, and doubt.

His silence and sternness were now accounted for—Isaac was reproaching himself with his

shameful weakness, and did not dare to excuse himself to her.

"I will not say one word," said she to herself, as she hopelessly clasped her hands together, and watched him as he worked. "I will never reproach him; but I—I will pray to God to shorten my life, and take me away from evils I feel I have not the courage to face."

She thought of Parson Hill's warning words. She shuddered at the recollection of the fate of Hannah Barker. And when their arrangements were at length finished, Mary loaded herself with as many light articles as she could carry, and Isaac took such larger things as were portable in the hands of one person.

Once arrived at the smithy cottage, Mary remained there; but Isaac went backwards and forwards till a late, or, rather, early hour in the morning, occupying himself by doing work that could have been done in one fourth of the time, if he had had help.

But Isaac had learned at the "Packhorse" that evening, that neither he nor Mary need look for anything but vituperation and sarcasm from his

late boon companions. It was known, even so soon, that Mary was dismissed from the school; and the villagers, surmising that the newly married pair were cast aside by the parson, would not fail to show them all the ill-will and spite that had been formerly engendered by Isaac's prosperity and Mary's exclusiveness.

Then they who had been jealous of the great favour shown by the parson to Isaac, now rejoiced heartily in his downfall. They who envied his talents and learning, gratified themselves with the idea "that now Isaac would get no more fine books from the passon."

Several men amongst the ringers thought they could ring quite as well without Isaac as with him. And now that he had not the parson for a "stand-by," to use their own words, "they would stand by theirselves, and just kick he out."

The men of the choir thought there was no necessity that Isaac should be set over them. They had voices enough; and they knew music well enough without him. There was young Bill Sawyer had brought heaps of beautiful Church music from London; and he had a famous voice,

which, if well practised in the choir, would be sure to turn out as good, if not even better, than Isaac's.

By degrees, as Isaac waited in the "Packhorse" for Jacob, he gathered this information from the many ill-natured tongues that were nightly harboured there, and that seemed to take a cruel pleasure in talking at him.

Isaac was repeatedly asked to join his old companions, and not set himself up for a great man, just because he had married Mistress Cope.

"She as was 'once upon a time' the schoolmistress of Lawsleigh," added they jeeringly.

Isaac did not reply to their jeers, nor indeed to any attack made upon himself. But when the Widow Mason stealthily filled and refilled the pewter pint from which Jacob was drinking, he told her—

"That Jacob had promised to help him; that he was come to fetch him; and, indeed, had been waiting there a long time; and that he could not afford to lose his time."

"Hark ye to he!" shouted the widow. "Him be a fine friend to a poor widdy. First he takes his self away—coz why? him has-a-gotten Molly

Cope to his wife. And, pray, how be she's face, Mister Isaac? And then he comes here a-wanting to take away the cheery company as always comes to I the nights. Cannot he keep his precious self away, and let alone them gentlemans as likes the good old 'Packhorse' and I?" said she, bridling and looking round. "And him durst not to his life to touch a drop of cider—coz why? hissen's wife, Molly, would claw him's beard for he! Oh! —oh!—my!"

The men laughed long and loud at the widow's unseemly speeches, which were many and rude, and of the fashion of the specimen just given; but certainly not worth recording here. Isaac bore them all without reply, and only making an occasional effort to get Jacob away. At length, fancying the case hopeless, and that Jacob would not stir till the time had gone by in which he would be useful, and feeling very anxious about poor Mary, he arose to go away, saying to Jacob,

"I am sorry I cannot wait longer, but——"

"I will come—I will come," said Jacob, just as the widow had stealthily filled another pint.

"You must not leave your cider, Mister Jacob," said she.

"I have supped it up, widdy, and I be a-going," said he, rising unsteadily.

"Why, here be the cup full, Jacob," said the widow, as she showed it to him.

"Never mind that, Jacob," said Isaac, too glad to have the hope of getting him away; and in his eagerness forgetting his caution, "the widow has just refilled the cup—I saw her."

By this time the men were near the door.

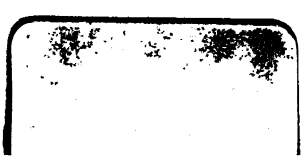
"Oh!—oh!—you seed it, did you?—then take it with you," and the angry woman attempted to dash the cider in his face.

Isaac saw her intention. The widow then stepped back. Isaac seeing the woman withdraw, and thinking that now was his time, hastily pushed Jacob out, and attempted to escape from any further violence on her part; but he was too late.

In his agitation he had pushed Jacob, who had already had a good deal of cider, with too much force, and he fell over the door-sill and out into the street; while Isaac, dodging from the woman's uplifted arm, stumbled over the prostrate body of

Jacob, as the contents of the cider-cup were dashed in his face, and thus blinded his eyes for the moment and saturated his clothes; which latter retained the scent of the cider for some time afterwards.

As the men lay sprawling in the street for a second or two, and at the open door of the "Pack-horse," almost unable to help themselves from the nature of their fall, Mr. Gray passed by on the opposite side of the street. It was a bright moon-light night, and the curate stood waiting until the two men arose from their recumbent position, and then he recognised Jacob Smerdon and Isaac Watson, and saw them walk unsteadily on, Jacob leaning on Isaac's arm.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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